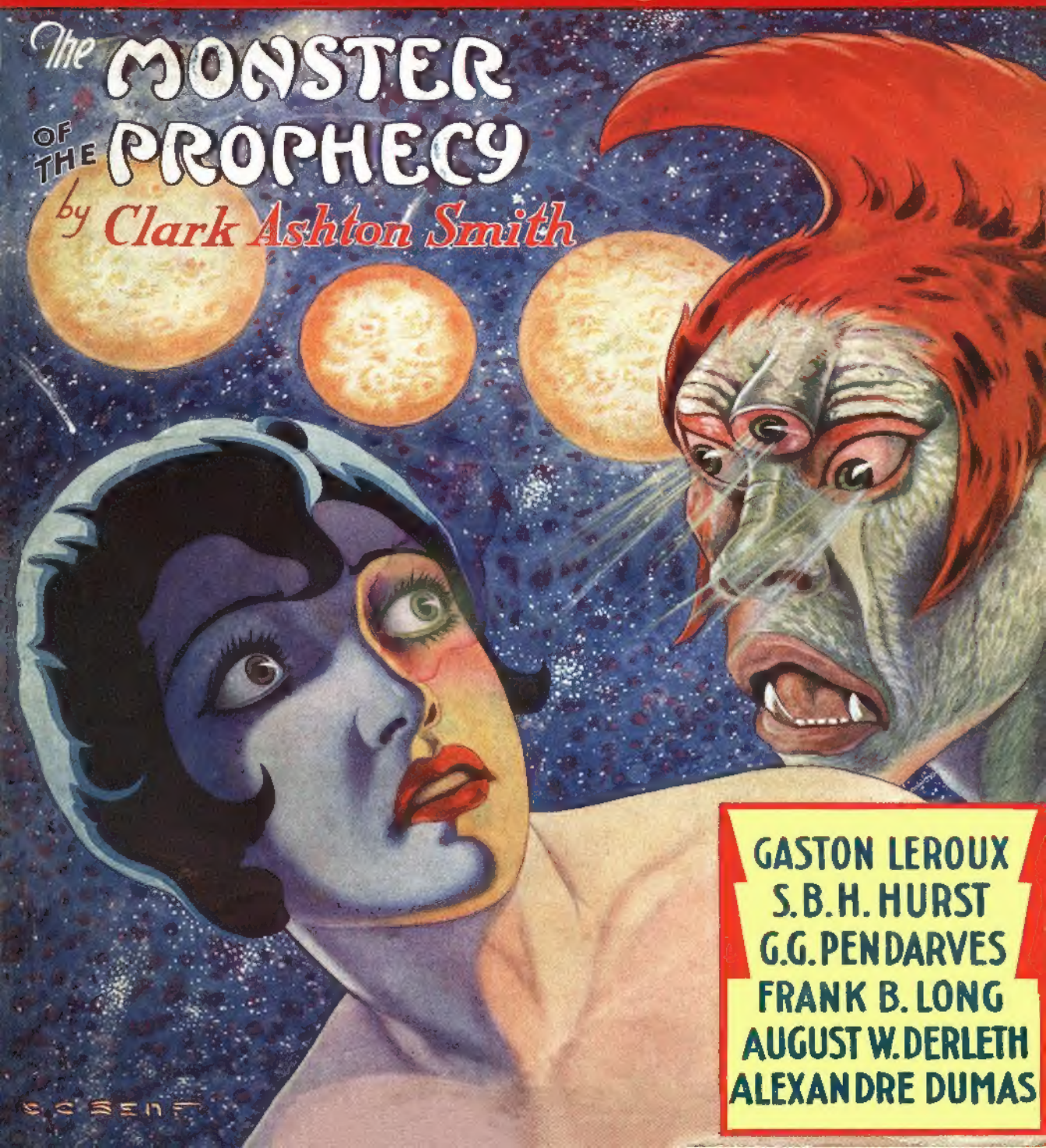
Weird Tales

JAN. 1932

The Unique Magazine

25 CENTS



GASTON LEROUX
S. B. H. HURST
G. G. PENDARVES
FRANK B. LONG
AUGUST W. DERLETH
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

All the Glamor *and* Mystery *of the* Orient

THE Orient, land of intrigues, red war and languorous loves, home of Harun al Raschid the Just, Tamerlane the Magnificent, and Ghengis Khan the Red Scourge. All the glitter and pageantry of Samarkand in the Valley of Zarab Shan, Herat of the Hundred Gardens, Bagdad, Damascus, and the fabled cities of Cathay. Xanadu, home of Kubla Khan; Bokhara, Mandalay, Singapore—the very names breathe romance, adventure, and the mystery of hidden things. Devil-dancing lamas of the inscrutable Tibet, the veiled allure of Oriental harems, the charge of fierce Arab tribesmen, the dancing of almond-eyed maidens under a Burmese moon, the barbaric splendor of mediæval sultans, the ageless life of Egypt, and the deathless allure of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

ORIENTAL STORIES

Entertainment of a quality not found outside

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

Now on Sale

If your magazine dealer is sold out mail 25c to the Publishers at 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

"PSYCHIANA"

(*The New Psychological Religion*)

A new and revolutionary religious teaching based entirely on the misunderstood sayings of the Galilean Carpenter, and designed to show how to find and use the same identical power that He used.

"PSYCHIANA" Believes and Teaches as Follows:

Dr. Frank B. Robinson
Founder of "Psychiana"

FIRST—That there is no such thing as a "subconscious mind."

SECOND—That there is, in this universe, a FAR MORE POTENT and DYNAMIC POWER, the manifestations of which have been erroneously credited to some other supposed power called the "subconscious mind."

THIRD—That this INVISIBLE, DYNAMIC Power is THE VERY SAME POWER that JESUS USED when He staggered the nations by His so-called "miracles," and by raising the dead.

FOURTH—That Jesus had NO MONOPOLY on this Power.

FIFTH—That it is possible for EVERY NORMAL human being understanding spiritual law as He understood it, TO DUPLICATE EVERY WORK THAT THIS CARPENTER OF GALILEE EVER DID. When He said "the things that I do shall YE DO ALSO"—He meant EXACTLY WHAT HE SAID.

SIXTH—That this dynamic Power is NOT TO BE FOUND "within," but has its source in a far different direction.

SEVENTH—THAT THE WORDS OF THIS GALILEAN CARPENTER WENT A THOUSAND MILES OVER THE HEADS OF HIS HEARERS 2,000 YEARS AGO, AND ARE STILL A THOUSAND MILES OVER THE HEADS OF THOSE WHO PROFESS TO FOLLOW HIM TODAY.

EIGHTH—That this same MIGHTY, INVISIBLE, PULSATING, THROBBING POWER can be used by anyone—AT ANY HOUR OF THE DAY OR NIGHT and without such methods as "going into the silence" or "gazing at bright objects, etc."

NINTH—That when once understood and correctly used, this mighty Power is ABUNDANTLY ABLE, AND NEVER FAILS TO GIVE HEALTH, HAPPINESS, and OVERWHELMING SUCCESS in whatever line it may be desired.

DR. FRANK B. ROBINSON

one of the keenest psychological minds this country has ever produced and one of the most earnest intense searchers into the spiritual realm believes, after years of experimentation and research, that there is in this world today, an UNSEEN power or force, so dynamic in itself, that all other powers or forces FADE INTO INSIGNIFICANCE BESIDE IT. He believes that this power or force is THE VERY SAME POWER THAT JESUS USED. He believes further that the entire world, including the present church structure, MISSED IN ITS ENTIRETY the message that He came to bring. He believes that

The world is on the verge of the most stupendous spiritual upheaval it has ever experienced—the advent of Christ being of small importance when compared to it.

FREE ... FREE ... FREE

Every reader of WEIRD TALES is cordially invited to write "PSYCHIANA" for more details of this revolutionary teaching which, if true, might very easily be discussed the ENTIRE WORLD ROUND. Dr. Robinson will tell you something of his years of search for the truth as he KNEW it must exist, and will give you a few facts connected with the founding of "PSYCHIANA." NO OBLIGATIONS WHATSOEVER. Sign your name and address here.

NOTICE

The requests for this course of instruction and information concerning it have broken all records. Replies have come to us literally by the thousand and students have enrolled for the course by the hundred. We expected the course to be a success, but we did NOT anticipate the overwhelming number of replies which we have to date received. We are rapidly getting our heads above water and hope to be able to discontinue the use of printed acknowledgments we have been forced to use to date and personally reply to all letters.

Name .....

Street and Number .....

City .....

State .....

Send this to "Psychiana," Moscow, Idaho

W. T. 1

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIX NUMBER 1

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $2.50 a year in the United States, $4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4 London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright 1931, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

Contents for January, 1932

Cover Design ..... C. C. Senf

Suggested by "The Monster of the Prophecy"

The Eyrie 4

A chat with the readers

The Monster of the Prophecy ..... Clark Ashton Smith 8

A story of cosmic scope, about a three-mooned world of the giant sun Antares, and a poet from our own earth

From the Dark Halls of Hell ..... G. G. Pendarves 32

A tale of the beautiful violinist, Erzebet, and the invocation of evil powers to work revenge for her

Those Who Seek ..... August W. Derleth 49

The tale of a ghastly encounter with the elementals that haunted a ruined British abbey

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

The Malignant Invader.....**Frank Belknap Long, Jr.** **56**

A powerful story of a horror from the bowels of the earth, by the author of "The Space-Eaters"

The Haunted Chair (Part 2).....**Gaston Leroux** **64**

A novel of eery murders, sudden deaths and weird adventures, by the author of "The Phantom of the Opera"

The Head.....**S. B. H. Hurst** **87**

A strange and unusual story of psychic memory—a tale of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex

The Dragon Girl.....**Edith de Garis** **96**

A thrilling Japanese tale about the fiery love of a Geisha girl for an Englishman, and the weird dragon dance

The Ring.....**J. M. Fry** **104**

A series of startling and blood-chilling happenings beset the man who wore that ancient Egyptian ring

A Queen in Other Skies.....**Donald Wandrei** **109**

Verse

Abductor Minimi Digit.....**Ralph Milne Farley** **110**

A peculiar story about a man who willed into action a disused muscle that wiggled his toe

Mive.....**Carl Jacobi** **113**

A tale of gigantic insects and a peculiar adventure out on the moor where they were encountered

The Silver Knife.....**Ralph Allen Lang** **117**

A shivery tale of Wolf Dahlgren, and his gruesome adventure with a great wolf that trailed him through the arctic wastes

The Ordeal of Wooden-Face.....**Hal K. Wells** **121**

A brief story is this, about a man whose thirst for revenge was the passion that ruled his life

Weird Story Reprint

The Wolf-Leader (Part 6).....**Alexandre Dumas** **123**

A werewolf story by a great French novelist, which does not appear in his collected works in English

---

For Advertising Rates in WEIRD TALES Apply Direct to

WEIRD TALES

Western Advertising Office:
NORMAN C. NOURSE
1031 S. Broadway
Los Angeles, Calif.

Central Advertising Office:
HARLEY L. WARD, INC.
360 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, Ill.
Phone, Central 6269

Eastern Advertising Office:
D. P. RIKER, Mgr.
392 Fourth Ave.
New York, N. Y.
Phone, Gramercy 5380

WEIRD TALES is making new friends right along, as evidenced by the letters we are receiving from enthusiastic new readers.

"I did not know there was such a magazine as WEIRD TALES until my attention was attracted by the striking cover of your November issue," writes Dorothea Brandin, of Cincinnati. "Your magazine is certainly different, and a welcome change. You have gained a reader for as long as you continue to print stories as good as Kirk Mashburn's *Placide's Wife*. It was one of the very best vampire stories I have ever read. Give us some more like it."

A letter to the Eyrie from Walter R. Sharp, of Bakersfield, California, says: "I am a new reader of your magazine, having read only your last two issues, and I must say I have enjoyed them very much. The story I most enjoyed was in your November issue: *Placide's Wife,* by Kirk Mashburn. Not only was the plot good, but the author has unusual command of the English language. I am looking forward to more of your issues, especially more stories by this author."

Mrs. P. N. Smith, of Rison, Arkansas, writes to the Eyrie: "I have just finished reading the November issue of WEIRD TALES, and think it one of the best issues in some time. My favorite story in this issue was *Placide's Wife,* by Kirk Mashburn. I have a weakness for vampire stories and think this an especially good one, the ending being different from most vampire tales. I also liked Robert E. Howard's *The Black Stone,* and, of course, *Tam, Son of the Tiger.* I am looking forward with pleasure to *The Devil's Bride,* by Quinn. I thing he is among your best writers."

"Of all the stories I have read in many issues of WEIRD TALES," writes William Welborn, from Portland, Oregon, "*Placide's Wife* appeals to me most. Incidentally, Kirk Mashburn is a favorite with both my wife and myself. The only complaint we have to offer is we don't get enough of his stories."

Ian C. Knox, one of our English readers, writes to the Eyrie: "I consider *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* by Otis Adelbert Kline, the best story you have had since I first read your magazine. Get another from that author as quickly as possible—the sooner the better. Your other stories are very good, too; only please give us more interplanetary ones."

An interesting letter from a reader who signs himself "Nimble Fingers" says: "I have enjoyed your magazine immensely. Your stories are entirely different. There is one story in particular that I liked. Perhaps it appealed to me because I am also of that company of 'good thieves and adventurers, in all such enterprises which require

(Please turn to page 6)

BAFFLING MYSTERY STORIES

GIVEN FREE

12 THRILLING DETECTIVE ADVENTURES

If You Act Now!

HERE THEY ARE

1. **The Valley of Missing Men**—Read how Parkinson discovered this baffling mystery—a story pulsating with hair-raising incidents.
2. **Buff**—A cub reporter and a death mystery—a story that works up to a crashing climax.
3. **The Triangle of Terror**—A gooseflesh story that will send the cold shivers up your spine.
4. **Crimson Poppies**—Dr. Howes evolves a fiendish plot to inherit the wealth of a lunatic millionaire.
5. **The Sign of the Toad**—An eerie detective story, full of exciting situations and mysterious deaths.
6. **The Mystery at Eagle Lodge**—Soul-gripping, fascinating, tense, full of action—You will move in the land of make-believe with a touch of the unreal.
7. **The Web**—This tale threads the sinister net that was torn asunder by the murder of James Blake.
8. **The Glass Eye**—The convict worked out a clever and diabolical scheme, but a dead man's eye betrayed him.
9. **Ten Dangerous Hours**—Bristling with excitement and full of surprises—a remarkable story with thrills galore.
10. **Disappearing Bullets**—Crammed with blood-curdling action and strange happenings in the underworld — master-mind crooks and criminals.
11. **The Green-Eyed Monster**—A thrilling book, replete with startling climaxes and bristling with action.
12. **Dearing-Do**—A vivid tale of Chinamen, opium traffic, the secret service, and desperate fighting.

READ how Experience Smith, master detective, solved the baffling mystery of "Disappearing Bullets"—a swift-action story with dramatic situations. Each one an exciting detective story. These novels formerly sold for the regular price of $1.00 per set. Now, for a limited time only, we are giving them away absolutely free with a year's subscription to ORIENTAL STORIES, the latest magazine of thrilling mystery adventure stories.

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER

ORIENTAL STORIES is rapidly growing in circulation because of its fascinating stories of the East. The Orient makes a romantic appeal to the imagination that no other part of the world can equal. The inscrutable mystery of Tibet, the veiled allure of Oriental harems, the charge of fierce Arab tribesmen, the singing of almond-eyed maidens under a Japanese moon, the whirling of dervishes, the barbaric splendor of mediaval sultans, the ageless life of Egypt—from all these the story-writers weave charms to shut out the humdrum world of everyday life, and transport the reader into a fairyland of imagination, but a fairyland that exists in its full reality in Asia. Simply send $1.00, the regular yearly subscription price for ORIENTAL STORIES, and the 12 Detective Story Novels will be sent to you without cost. A $2.00 value for $1.00. You receive the magazine for one year and the novels free of charge. The supply of novels is limited, so hurry.

ORIENTAL STORIES

840 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. A-5, Chicago, Ill.

ORIENTAL STORIES, Dept. A-5,
840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

I enclose $1.00. Send at once, postage prepaid, the 12 Detective Story Novels advertised, and enter my subscription to ORIENTAL STORIES for one year. It is understood this $1.00 is payment in full.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

(Continued from page 4)

deft fingers and a habit of mind both agile and adroit.' Perhaps you will think I am boasting, but I am not, as it doesn't pay to boast in this profession. By this time, no doubt, you will be wondering what story I am referring to: it is *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros.* I have never read a story more entertaining and amusing than this one. What an adventure!"

E. Lorenzo Mendez de Joel, of Minneapolis, writes to the Eyrie: "Allow me to congratulate you on the true strokes of genius that now and then characterize your unique magazine. Especially in the choice of your reprints you always show excellent judgment. *The Wolf-Leader,* by Alexandre Dumas, fils, for instance, is a charming piece of literature. But then some of your steady contributors in this country, too, deserve hearty praise as talented writers with powerful fancy and truly artistic touch in word painting. Lovecraft as portrayer of the hair-raising and terrifying, Otis Adelbert Kline as a powerful and fascinating Orientalist, Seabury Quinn as the creator of those irresistible petit-monsieur Jules de Grandin stories, humorous, occult-scientific and peppy at the same time; I could mention others, but—well, there are also those whose stories I skip. For one thing, I think our own world among the planets and stars has more than enough mysteries and uncanny things to feed the most inebriate fancy; so I can not see any necessity of chasing through the universe on insane flights with space-ships from solar system to solar system to seek adventures which are often weaker and more trivial than ordinary human earth-stories. David H. Keller, author of the unusually interesting and by no means impossible narrative, *The Seeds of Death,* certainly deserves encores, even despite the fact that he gave his narrative a wrong ending."

"May a high school freshie join your admirers?" inquires Rosemary Muehncke, of Oconto, Wisconsin. "I started reading WEIRD TALES this summer and have been getting the magazine every month. The spookier the stories are the better I like them, so won't you please print more about Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin? I have the November number and was disappointed when there were no stories by Seabury Quinn; but *Placide's Wife* by Kirk Mashburn was very good and *The Second-Hand Limousine* comes second."

Mrs. Frank Wolf, of Shreveport, Louisiana, writes: "*Placide's Wife* is so true to Cajun life and the dialect is perfect. Let us have more like it."

Donald Wandrei, author of *The Red Brain,* writes to the editor: "Permit me to congratulate you on the recent Clark Ashton Smith stories, which are always poetic; on Lovecraft's *The Whisperer in Darkness,* which is another masterpiece of cosmic horror; and on Keller's *The Seeds of Death.* This last story is one of the most entertaining that WEIRD TALES has printed. Its artistic blending of the fantastic, the romantic, the exotic, and the legendary is a fine example of what the weird tale can be at its best."

"What a magazine!" writes Robert Leonard Russell, of Mount Vernon, Illinois. "Old W. T. gets better every issue. Your November issue was excellent, and the cover was the best Senf has done so far. As to scientific stories, I am greatly opposed to this type in W. T. I prefer tales of horror and utter weirdness."

Donald Coveyou, of Petoskey, Michigan, suggests: "Have more stories dealing

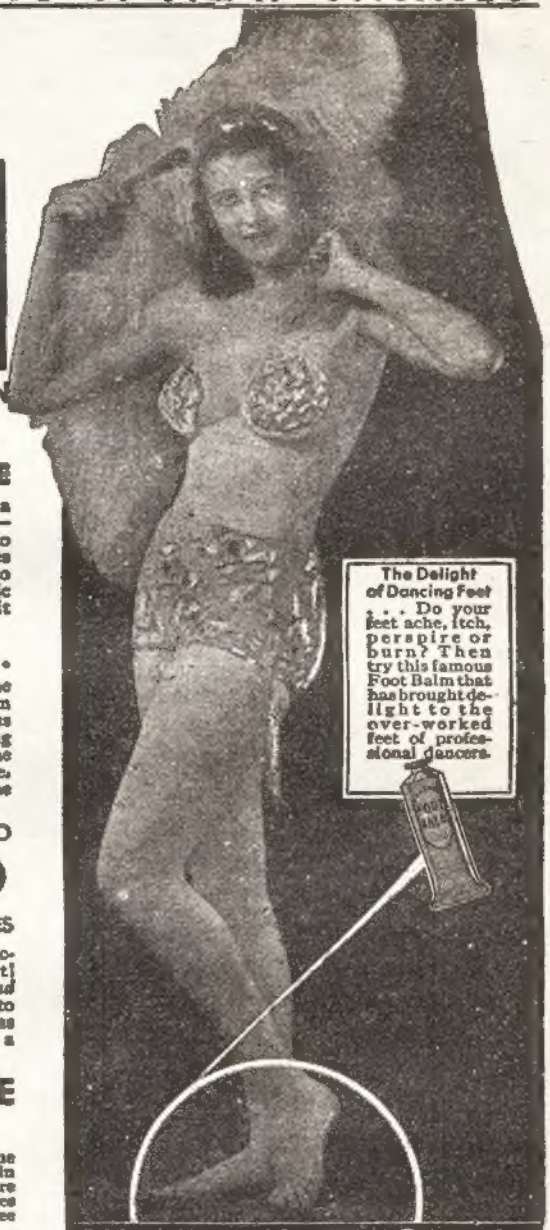
(Please turn to page 142)

DANCER ON WAY TO STARDOM • [redacted] • WANTS A NEW NAME!

★ (NEWS ITEM)

On the very threshold of international fame and fortune, Jeanne Williams wants a new "Stage Name." Young—graceful—talented; her beautiful body is vibrant with the magnetic glow of youthful personality. Critics say her performances are "Sensational", "Exotique", and that she is at the door of stardom. . . . Now, because her name is similar to that of another star of Broadway, she wants a NEW name by which she will be featured and which she hopes to carry to fame.

We Will Pay $500.00 Just for a Girl's Name



COSTS NOTHING TO WIN

Nothing to Buy—Nothing to Sell—No Entrance Fees—No "Number Paths" nor "Guessing" to Win This Cash Prize

JUST SUGGEST A GIRL'S NAME

What an amazing opportunity! You may win this big cash prize in only a moment's time. Simply send us a name for this graceful young dancer—*nothing more to do.* Sound easy? It *is* easy! The first name that comes to your mind this minute may be the very one to win $500.00 cash. It does not have to be a "fancy" name—just some simple name that is easy to say and easy to remember—a name that will look well in blazing electric lights in front of the nation's finest theatres. Think of a name—send it Today—Win $500.00 Cash—qualify for $3,000.00 opportunity.

NO WAY YOU CAN LOSE . . . .

Simply suggest the winning name—that is all you have to do to get the $500.00. We are giving the prize to advertise our marvelous Foot Balm that is even now used by many professional dancers. Because a famous name is valuable in advertising, the new name chosen for this rising young dancer will also be used as the name for our Foot Balm—her fame will bring us big advertising. . . . It is your opportunity of a life-time. Maybe your own name, or the name of a friend may be the very name we want. Nothing for you to lose—a *fortune* for you to win.

JUST SENDING A NAME QUALIFIES YOU FOR OPPORTUNITY TO

Win $3,000.00

OR BUICK 8 CYLINDER SEDAN AND $1,500.00 IN CASH BESIDES

This money is entirely *separate and in addition* to the prize for the Dancer's Name. Over 50 huge cash prizes—3 fine automobiles. Think of it! You may win *over $3,000.00 cash or a new Buick 8 Cylinder Sedan and $1,500.00 Cash besides!* What a magnificent fortune! Some one is going to get it—why not you? You have just as good an opportunity to win as anyone. Suggest a name for the Dancer. Do it now—it may mean a *fortune* for you.

$1,000.00 CASH CERTIFICATE

Will Be Sent to You At Once—BE PROMPT

One thousand dollars EXTRA if you are PROMPT and win first prize. So don't delay! Send your name suggested *promptly*—nothing more to do now or ever toward getting the Name Prize and to qualify for the opportunity to win the other huge prizes. *You can't lose anything*—EVERY PERSON WHO TAKES AN ACTIVE PART WILL BE REWARDED IN CASH. *I will send you a $1,000.00 Cash Certificate as soon as your name is received*—I will tell you just how you stand in the distribution of over $5,000.00 in cash prizes and fine new automobiles

Hundreds Have Won

Viola Lauder, Oregon, was destitute—her home burned down. She suggested a name for our toilet soap and won a big cash prize of $900.00! H. L. Adams, Pa., won over $2000.00. Hundreds of others made happy by big prizes and rewards. Now, some yet unknown person is going to win $3,000.00 cash; many others are going to be made happy with scores of prizes as high as $750.00. Three fine cars will be given.

Read These Simple Rules

Contest open to all except employees of our company. Only one name may be submitted—sending more than one name will cause all names sent by you to be thrown out. Suggest a first and last name for the dancer. Contest closing date given in my first letter to you. In case of duplicate winning names, duplicate prizes will be given. Every person submitting a name qualifies for opportunity to win $3,000.00 cash or Buick 8 Cylinder Sedan and $1,500.00 in cash. Use the coupon or write a letter to submit name and receive all details.

WALTER BRENT, Mgr.

906 Sycamore Street Dept. 685-PP Cincinnati, Ohio

Winning Name Coupon

WALTER BRENT, Mgr.,
906 Sycamore St., Dept. 685-PP, Cincinnati, Ohio.

The Name I suggest for the Dancer is:_____

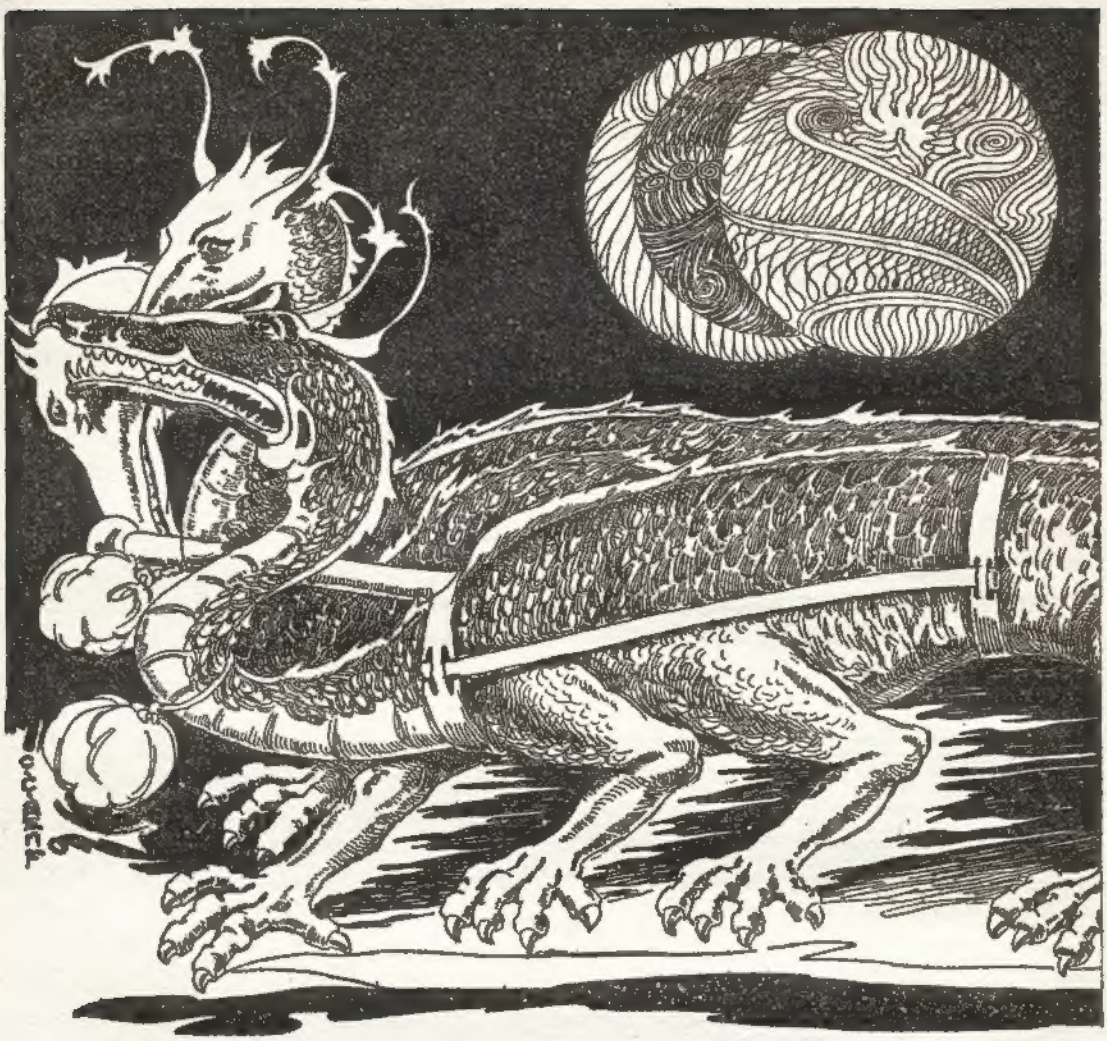
_____

Name_____

Address_____

City_____State_____

Rush me the $1,000.00 Cash Certificate for Promptness and tell me how I stand for Winning $3,000.00 cash.

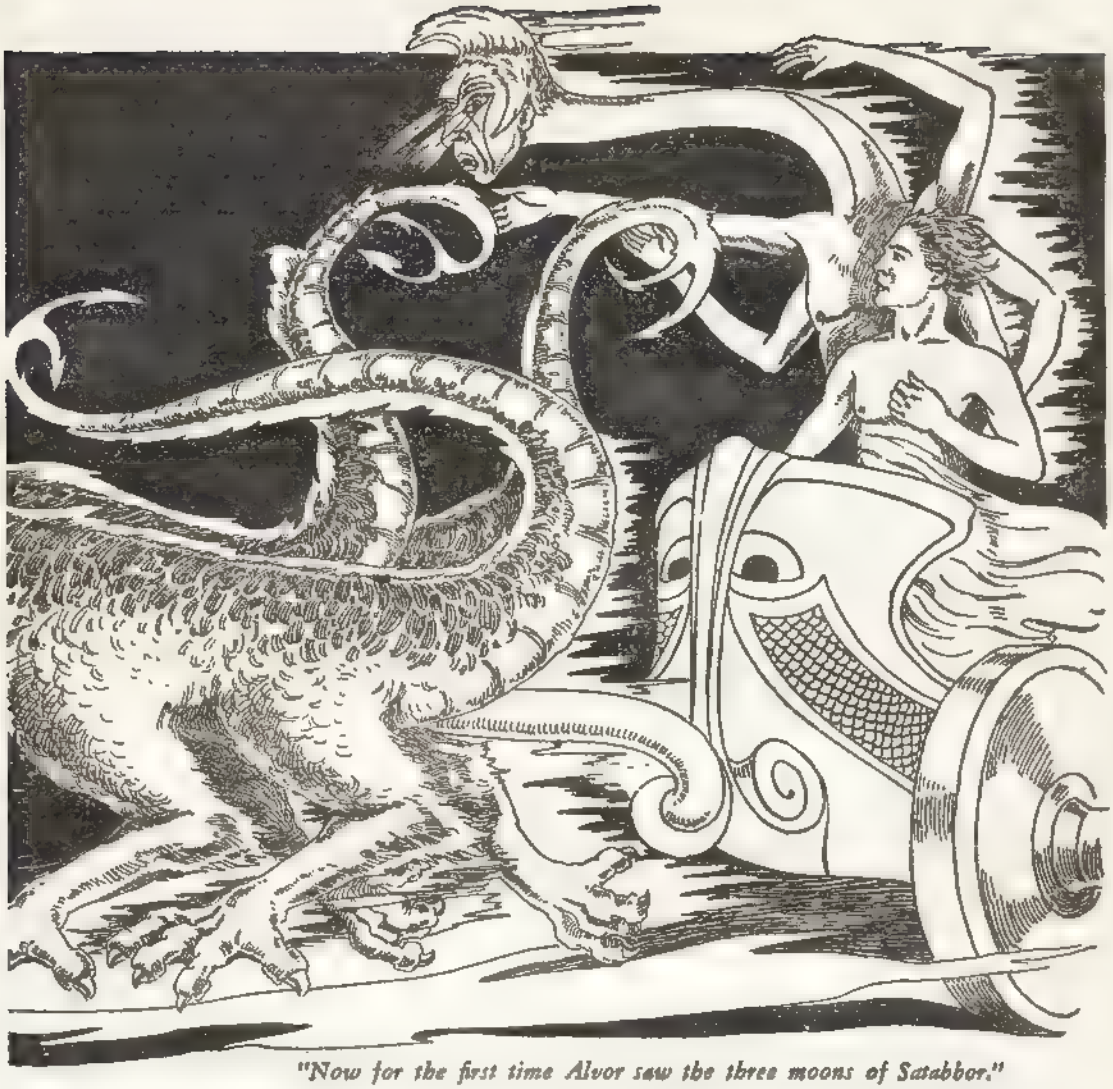


THE MONSTER OF THE PROPHECY

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

An utterly strange novelette about the adventures of a poet from Earth among the people that inhabit a three-mooned planet of the star Antares

A DISMAL, fog-dank afternoon was turning into a murky twilight when Theophilus Alvor paused on Brooklyn Bridge to peer down at the dim river with a shudder of sinister surmise. He was wondering how it would feel to cast himself into the chill, turbid waters, and whether he could summon up the necessary courage for an act which, he had persuaded himself, was now becoming inevitable as well as laudable. He felt that he was too weary, sick and dis-



"Now for the first time Alvor saw the three moons of Satabbor."

heartened to go on with the evil dream of existence.

From any human standpoint, there was doubtless abundant reason for Alvor's depression. Young, and full of unquenched visions and desires, he had come to Brooklyn from an up-state village three months before, hoping to find a publisher for his writings; but his old-fashioned classic verses, in spite (or because) of their high imaginative fire, had been unanimously rejected both by magazines and book-firms. Though Alvor had lived frugally and had chosen lodgings so humble as almost to constitute the proverbial poetic garret, the small sum of his savings was now exhausted. He was not only quite penniless, but his clothes were so worn as to be no longer presentable in editorial offices, and the soles of his shoes were becoming rapidly non-existent from the tramping he had done. He had not eaten for days, and his last meal, like the several preceding ones, had been at the expense of his soft-hearted Irish landlady.

For more reasons than one, Alvor would have preferred another death than that of drowning. The foul and icy waters were not inviting from an esthetic viewpoint; and in spite of all he had heard to the contrary, he did not believe that

such a death could be anything but painful and disagreeable. By choice he would have selected a sovereign Oriental opiate, whose insidious slumber would have led through a realm of gorgeous dreams to the gentle night of an ultimate oblivion; or, failing this, a deadly poison of merciful swiftness. But such Lethean media are not readily obtainable by a man with an empty purse.

Damning his own lack of forethought in not reserving enough money for such an eventuation, Alvor shuddered on the twilight bridge, and looked at the dismal waters, and then at the no less dismal fog through which the troubled lights of the city had begun to break. And then, through the instinctive habit of a country-bred person who is also imaginative and beauty-seeking, he looked at the heavens above the city to see if any stars were visible. He thought of his recent *Ode to Antares,* which, unlike his earlier productions, was written in *vers libre* and had a strong modernistic irony mingled with its planturous lyricism. It had, however, proved as unsalable as the rest of his poems. Now, with a sense of irony far more bitter than that which he had put into his ode, he looked for the ruddy spark of Antares itself, but was unable to find it in the sodden sky. His gaze and his thoughts returned to the river.

"There is no need for that, my young friend," said a voice at his elbow. Alvor was startled not only by the words and by the clairvoyance they betrayed, but also by something that was unanalyzably strange in the tones of the voice that uttered them. The tones were both refined and authoritative; but in them there was a quality which, for lack of more precise words or imagery, he could think of only as metallic and unhuman. While his mind wrestled with swift-born unseizable fantasies, he turned to look at the stranger who had accosted him.

The man was neither uncommonly nor disproportionately tall; and he was modishly dressed, with a long overcoat and top hat. His features were not unusual, from what could be seen of them in the dusk, except for his full-lidded and burning eyes, like those of some nyctalopic animal. But from him there emanated a palpable sense of things that were inconceivably strange and terrifying and remote —a sense that was more patent, more insistent than any impression of mere form and odor and sound could have been, and which was well-nigh tactual in its intensity.

"I repeat," continued the man, "that there is no necessity for you to drown yourself in that river. A vastly different fate can be yours, if you choose. . . . In the meanwhile, I shall be honored and delighted if you will accompany me to my house, which is not far away."

In a daze of astonishment preclusive of all analytical thought, or even of any clear cognizance of where he was going or what was happening, Alvor followed the stranger for several blocks in the swirling fog. Hardly knowing how he had come there, he found himself in the library of an old house which must in its time have had considerable pretensions to aristocratic dignity, for the paneling, carpet and furniture were all antique and were both rare and luxurious.

The poet was left alone for a few minutes in the library. Then his host reappeared and led him to a dining-room where an excellent meal for two had been brought in from a neighboring restaurant. Alvor, who was faint with inanition, ate with no attempt to conceal his ravening appetite, but noticed that the stranger made scarcely even a pretense of touching

his own food. With a manner preoccupied and distrait, the man sat opposite Alvor, giving no more ostensible heed to his guest than the ordinary courtesies of a host required.

"We will talk now," said the stranger, when Alvor had finished. The poet, whose energies and mental faculties had been revived by the food, became bold enough to survey his host with a frank attempt at appraisal. He saw a man of indefinite age, whose lineaments and complexion were Caucasian, but whose nationality he was unable to determine. The eyes had lost something of their weird luminosity beneath the electric light, but nevertheless they were most remarkable, and from them there poured a sense of unearthly knowledge and power and strangeness not to be formulated by human thought or conveyed in human speech. Under his scrutiny, vague, dazzling, intricate unshapable images rose on the dim borders of the poet's mind and fell back into oblivion ere he could confront them. Apparently without rime or reason, some lines of his *Ode to Antares* returned to him, and he found that he was repeating them over and over beneath his breath:

"Star of strange hope,
Pharos beyond our desperate mire,
Lord of unscalable gulfs,
Lamp of unknowable life."

The hopeless, half-satiric yearning for another sphere which he had expressed in this poem, haunted his thoughts with a weird insistence.

"Of course, you have no idea who or what I am," said the stranger, "though your poetic intuitions are groping darkly toward the secret of my identity. On my part, there is no need for me to ask you anything, since I have already learned all that there is to learn about your life, your personality, and the dismal predicament from which I am now able to offer you a means of escape. Your name is Theophilus Alvor, and you are a poet whose classic style and romantic genius are not likely to win adequate recognition in this age and land. With an inspiration more prophetic than you dream, you have written, among other masterpieces, a quite admirable *Ode to Antares*."

"How do you know all this?" cried Alvor.

"To those who have the sensory apparatus with which to perceive them, thoughts are no less audible than spoken words. I can hear your thoughts, so you will readily understand that there is nothing surprizing in my possession of more or less knowledge concerning you."

"But who are you?" exclaimed Alvor. "I have heard of people who could read the minds of others; but I did not believe that there was any human being who actually possessed such powers."

"I am not a human being," rejoined the stranger, "even though I have found it convenient to don the semblance of one for a while, just as you or another of your race might wear a masquerade costume. Permit me to introduce myself: my name, as nearly as can be conveyed in the phonetics of your world, is Vizaphmal, and I have come from a planet of the far-off mighty sun that is known to you as Antares. In my own world, I am a scientist, though the more ignorant classes look upon me as a wizard. In the course of profound experiments and researches, I have invented a device which enables me at will to visit other planets, no matter how remote in space. I have sojourned for varying intervals in more than one solar system; and I have found your world and its inhabitants so quaint and curious and monstrous that I have lingered here a little longer than I intended, because of my taste for the bizarre—a taste which is ineradicable, though no doubt reprehen-

sible. It is now time for me to return: urgent duties call me, and I can not tarry. But there are reasons why I should like to take with me to my world a member of your race; and when I saw you on the bridge tonight, it occurred to me that you might be willing to undertake such an adventure. You are, I believe, utterly weary of the sphere in which you find yourself, since a little while ago you were ready to depart from it into the unknown dimension that you call death. I can offer you something much more agreeable and diversified than death, with a scope of sensation, a potentiality of experience beyond anything of which you have had even the faintest intimation in the poetic reveries looked upon as extravagant by your fellows."

Again and again, while listening to this long and singular address, Alvor seemed to catch in the tones of the voice that uttered it a supervening resonance, a vibration of overtones beyond the compass of a mortal throat. Though perfectly clear and correct in all details of enunciation, there was a hint of vowels and consonants not to be found in any terrestrial alphabet. However, the logical part of his mind refused to accept entirely these intimations of the supermundane; and he was now seized by the idea that the man before him was some new type of lunatic.

"Your thought is natural enough, considering the limitations of your experience," observed the stranger calmly. "However, I can easily convince you of its error by revealing myself to you in my true shape."

He made the gesture of one who throws off a garment. Alvor was blinded by an insufferable blaze of light, whose white glare, emanating in huge beams from an orb-like center, filled the entire room and seemed to pass illimitably beyond through dissolving walls. When his eyes became accustomed to the light, he saw before him a being who had no conceivable likeness to his host. This being was more than seven feet in height, and had no less than five intricately jointed arms and three legs that were equally elaborate. His head, on a long, swan-like neck, was equipped not only with visual, auditory, nasal and oral organs of unfamiliar types, but had several appendages whose use was not readily to be determined. His three eyes, obliquely set and with oval pupils, rayed forth a green phosphorescence; the mouth, or what appeared to be such, was very small and had the lines of a downward-curving crescent; the nose was rudimentary, though with finely wrought nostrils; in lieu of eyebrows, he had a triple series of semicircular markings on his forehead, each of a different hue; and above his intellectually shapen head, above the tiny drooping ears with their complex lobes, there towered a gorgeous comb of crimson, not dissimilar in form to the crest on the helmet of a Grecian warrior. The head, the limbs and the whole body were mottled with interchanging lunes and moons of opalescent colors, never the same for a moment in their unresting flux and reflux.

Alvor had the sensation of standing on the rim of prodigious gulfs, on a new earth beneath new heavens; and the vistas of illimitable horizons, fraught with the multitudinous terror and manifold beauty of an imagery no human eye had ever seen, hovered and wavered and flashed upon him with the same unstable fluorescence as the lunar variegations of the body at which he stared with such stupefaction. Then, in a little while, the strange light seemed to withdraw upon itself, retracting all its beams to a common center, and faded in a whirl of darkness. When this darkness had cleared away, he saw once more the form of his host, in con-

ventional garb, with a slight ironic smile about his lips.

"Do you believe me now?" Vizaphmal queried.

"Yes, I believe you."

"Are you willing to accept my offer?"

"I accept it." A thousand questions were forming in Alvor's mind, but he dared not ask them. Divining these questions, the stranger spoke as follows:

"You wonder how it is possible for me to assume a human shape. I assure you, it is merely a matter of taking thought. My mental images are infinitely clearer and stronger than those of any earth-being, and by conceiving myself as a man, I can appear to you and your fellows as such.

"You wonder also as to the modus operandi of my arrival on earth. This I shall now show and explain to you, if you will follow me."

He led the way to an upper story of the old mansion. Here, in a sort of attic, beneath a large skylight in the southward-sloping roof, there stood a curious mechanism, wrought of a dark metal which Alvor could not identify. It was a tall, complicated framework with many transverse bars and two stout upright rods terminating at each end in a single heavy disk. These disks seemed to form the main portions of the top and bottom.

"Put your hand between the bars," commanded Alvor's host.

Alvor tried to obey this command, but his fingers met with an adamantine obstruction, and he realized that the intervals of the bars were filled with an unknown material clearer than glass or crystal.

"You behold here," said Vizaphmal, "an invention which, I flatter myself, is quite unique anywhere this side of the galactic suns. The disks at top and bottom are a vibratory device with a twofold use; and no other material than that of which they are wrought would have the same properties, the same achievable rates of vibration. When you and I have locked ourselves within the framework, as we shall do anon, a few revolutions of the lower disk will have the effect of isolating us from our present environment, and we shall find ourselves in the midst of what is known to you as space, or ether. The vibrations of the upper disk, which we shall then employ are of such potency as to annihilate space itself in any direction desired. Space, like everything else in the atomic universe, is subject to laws of integration and dissolution. It was merely a matter of finding the vibrational power that would effect this dissolution; and, by untiring research, by ceaseless experimentation, I located and isolated the rare metallic elements which, in a state of union, are capable of this power."

While the poet was pondering all he had seen and heard, Vizaphmal touched a tiny knob, and one side of the framework swung open. He then turned off the electric light in the garret, and simultaneously with its extinction, a ruddy glow was visible in the interior of the machine, serving to illumine all the parts, but leaving the room around it in darkness. Standing beside his invention, Vizaphmal looked at the skylight, and Alvor followed his gaze. The fog had cleared away and many stars were out, including the red gleam of Antares, now high in the south. The stranger was evidently making certain preliminary calculations, for he moved the machine a little after peering at the star, and adjusted a number of fine wires in the interior, as if he were tuning some stringed instrument.

At last he turned to Alvor.

"Everything is now in readiness," he announced. "If you are still prepared to accompany me, we will take our departure."

Alvor was conscious of an unexpected coolness and fortitude as he answered: "I am at your service." The unparalleled occurrences and disclosures of the evening, the well-nigh undreamable imminence of a plunge across untold immensitude, such as no man had been privileged to dare before, had really benumbed his imagination, and he was unable at the moment to conceive the true awesomeness of what he had undertaken.

VIZAPHMAL indicated the place where Alvor was to stand in the machine. The poet entered, and assumed a position between one of the upright rods and the side, opposite Vizaphmal. He found that a layer of the transparent material was interposed between his feet and the large disk in which the rods were based. No sooner had he stationed himself, than, with a celerity and an utter silence that were uncanny, the framework closed upon itself with hermetic tightness, till the jointure where it had opened was no longer detectable.

"We are now in a sealed compartment," explained the Antarean, "into which nothing can penetrate. Both the dark metal and the crystalline are substances that refuse the passage of heat and cold, of air and ether,or of any known cosmic ray, with the one exception of light itself, which is admitted by the clear metal."

When he ceased, Alvor realized that they were walled about with an insulating silence utter and absolute as that of some intersidereal void. The traffic in the streets without, the rumbling and roaring and jarring of the great city, so loud a minute before, might have been a million miles away in some other world for all that he could hear or feel of its vibration.

In the red glow that pervaded the machine, emanating from a source he could not discover, the poet gazed at his companion. Vizaphmal had now resumed his Antarean form, as if all necessity for a human disguise were at an end, and he towered above Alvor, glorious with intermerging zones of fluctuant colors, where hues the poet had not seen in any spectrum were simultaneous or intermittent with flaming blues and coruscating emeralds and amethysts and fulgurant purples and vermilions and saffrons. Lifting one of his five arms, which terminated in two finger-like appendages with many joints all capable of bending in any direction, the Antarean touched a thin wire that was stretched overhead between the two rods. He plucked at this wire like a musician at a lute-string, and from it there emanated a single clear note higher in pitch than anything Alvor had ever heard. Its sheer unearthly acuity caused a shudder of anguish to run through the poet, and he could scarcely have borne a prolongation of the sound, which, however, ceased in a moment and was followed by a much more endurable humming and singing noise which seemed to arise at his feet. Looking down, he saw that the large disk at the bottom of the medial rods had begun to revolve. This revolution was slow at first, but rapidly increased in its rate, till he could no longer see the movement; and the singing sound became agonizingly sweet and high till it pierced his senses like a knife.

Vizaphmal touched a second wire, and the revolution of the disk was brought abruptly to an end. Alvor felt an unspeakable relief at the cessation of the torturing music.

"We are now in etheric space," the

Antarean declared. "Look out, if you so desire."

Alvor peered through the interstices of the dark metal, and saw around and above and below them the unlimited blackness of cosmic night and the teeming of uncountable trillions of stars. He had a sensation of frightful and deadly vertigo, and staggered like a drunken man as he tried to keep himself from falling against the side of the machine.

Vizaphmal plucked at a third wire, but this time Alvor was not aware of any sound. Something that was like an electric shock, and also like the crushing impact of a heavy blow, descended upon his head and shook him to the soles of his feet. Then he felt as if his tissues were being stabbed by innumerable needles of fire, and then that he was being torn apart in a thousand thousand fragments, bone by bone, muscle by muscle, vein by vein, and nerve by nerve, on some invisible rack. He swooned and fell huddled in a corner of the machine, but his unconsciousness was not altogether complete. He seemed to be drowning beneath an infinite sea of darkness, beneath the accumulation of shoreless gulfs, and above this sea, so far away that he lost it again and again, there thrilled a supernal melody, sweet as the singing of sirens or the fabled music of the spheres, together with an insupportable dissonance like the shattering of all the battlements of time. He thought that all his nerves had been elongated to an enormous distance, where the outlying parts of himself were being tortured in the oubliettes of fantastic inquisitions by the use of instruments of percussion, diabolically vibrant, that were somehow identified with certain of his own body-cells. Once he thought that he saw Vizaphmal standing a million leagues remote on the shore of an alien planet, with a sky of soaring many-colored flame behind him and the night of all the universe rippling gently at his feet like a submissive ocean. Then he lost the vision, and the intervals of the far unearthly music became more prolonged, and at last he could not hear it at all, nor could he feel any longer the torturing of his remote nerve-ends. The gulf deepened above him, and he sank through eons of darkness and emptiness to the very nadir of oblivion.

2

ALVOR'S return to consciousness was even more slow and gradual than his descent into Lethe had been. Still lying at the bottom of a shoreless and boundless night, he became aware of an unidentifiable odor with which in some way the sense of ardent warmth was associated. This odor changed incessantly, as if it were composed of many diverse ingredients, each of which predominated in turn. Myrrh-like and mystic in the beginning as the fumes of an antique altar, it assumed the heavy languor of unimaginable flowers, the sharp sting of vaporizing chemicals unknown to science, the smell of exotic water and exotic earth, and then a medley of other elements that conveyed no suggestion of anything whatever, except of evolutionary realms and ranges that were beyond all human experience or calculation. For a while he lived and was awake only in his sensory response to this potpourri of odors; then the awareness of his own corporeal being came back to him through tactual sensations of an unusual order, which he did not at first recognize as being within himself, but which seemed to be those of a foreign entity in some other dimension, with whom he was connected across unbridgeable gulfs by a nexus of gossamer tenuity. This entity, he thought, was reclining on a material of great softness,

into which he sank with a supreme and leaden indolence and a feeling of sheer bodily weight that held him utterly motionless. Then, floating along the ebon cycles of the void, this being came with ineffable slowness toward Alvor, and at last, by no perceptible transition, by no breach of physical logic or mental congruity, was incorporate with him. Then a tiny light, like a star burning all alone in the center of infinitude, began to dawn far off; and it drew nearer and nearer and grew larger and larger till it turned the black void to a dazzling luminescence, to a many-tinted glory that smote full upon Alvor.

He found that he was lying with wide-open eyes on a huge couch, in a sort of pavilion consisting of a low and elliptical dome supported on double rows of diagonally fluted pillars. He was quite naked, though a sheet of some thin and pale yellow fabric had been thrown across his lower limbs. He saw at a glance, even though his brain-centers were still half benumbed as by the action of some opiate, that this fabric was not the product of any terrestrial loom. Beneath his body, the couch was covered with gray and purple stuffs, but whether they were made of feathers, fur or cloth he was altogether uncertain, for they suggested all three of these materials. They were very thick and resilient, and accounted for the sense of extreme softness underneath him that had marked his return from the swoon. The couch itself stood higher above the floor than an ordinary bed, and was also longer, and in his half-narcotized condition this troubled Alvor even more than other aspects of his situation which were far less normal and explicable.

Amazement grew upon him as he looked about with reviving faculties, for all that he saw and smelt and touched was totally foreign and unaccountable. The floor of the pavilion was wrought in a geometric marquetry of ovals, rhomboids and equilaterals, in white, black and yellow metals that no earthly mine had ever disclosed; and the pillars were of the same three metals, regularly alternating. The dome alone was entirely of yellow. Not far from the couch, there stood on a squat tripod a dark and wide-mouthed vessel from which poured an opalescent vapor. Some one standing behind it, invisible through the cloud of gorgeous fumes, was fanning the vapor toward Alvor. He recognized it as the source of the myrrh-like odor that had first troubled his reanimating senses. It was quite agreeable but was borne away from him again and again by gusts of hot wind which brought into the pavilion a mixture of perfumes that were both sweet and acrid and were altogether novel. Looking between the pillars, he saw the monstrous heads of towering blossoms with pagoda-like tiers of sultry, sullen petals, and beyond them a terraced landscape of low hills of mauve and nacarat soil, extending toward a horizon incredibly remote, till they rose and rose against the heavens. Above all this was a whitish sky, filled with a blinding radiation of intense light from a sun that was now hidden by the dome. Alvor's eyes began to ache, the odors disturbed and oppressed him, and he was possessed by a terrible dubiety and perplexity, amid which he remembered vaguely his meeting with Vizaphmal, and the events preceding his swoon. He was unbearably nervous, and for some time all his ideas and sensations took on the painful disorder and irrational fears of incipient delirium.

A figure stepped from behind the veering vapors and approached the couch. It was Vizaphmal, who bore in one of his five hands the large thin circular fan of

bluish metal he had been using. He was holding in another hand a tubular cup, half full of an erubescent liquid.

"Drink this," he ordered, as he put the cup to Alvor's lips. The liquid was so bitter and fiery that Alvor could swallow it only in sips, between periods of gasping and coughing. But once he had gotten it down, his brain cleared with celerity and all his sensations were soon comparatively normal.

"Where am I?" he asked. His voice sounded very strange and unfamiliar to him, and its effect bordered upon ventriloquism — which, as he afterward learned, was due to certain peculiarities of the atmospheric medium.

"You are on my country estate, in Ulphalor, a kingdom which occupies the whole northern hemisphere of Satabbor, the inmost planet of Sanarda, that sun which is called Antares in your world. You have been unconscious for three of our days, a result which I anticipated, knowing the profound shock your nervous system would receive from the experience through which you have passed. However, I do not think you will suffer any permanent illness or inconvenience; and I have just now administered to you a sovereign drug which will aid in the adjustment of your nerves and your corporeal functions to the novel conditions under which you are to live henceforward. I employed the opalescent vapor to arouse you from your swoon, when I deemed that it had become safe and wise to do this. The vapor is produced by the burning of an aromatic seaweed, and is magisterial in its restorative effect."

Alvor tried to grasp the full meaning of this information, but his brain was still unable to receive anything more than a melange of impressions that were totally new and obscure and outlandish. As he pondered the words of Vizaphmal, he saw that rays of bright light had fallen between the columns and were creeping across the floor. Then the rim of a vast ember-colored sun descended below the rim of the dome and he felt an overwhelming, but somehow not insupportable, warmth. His eyes no longer ached, not even in the direct beams of this luminary; nor did the perfumes irritate him, as they had done for a while.

"I think," said Vizaphmal, "that you may now arise. It is afternoon, and there is much for you to learn, and much to be done."

Alvor threw off the thin covering of yellow cloth, and sat up, with his legs hanging over the edge of the couch.

"But my clothing?" he queried.

"You will need none in our climate. No one has ever worn anything of the sort in Satabbor."

Alvor digested this idea, and though he was slightly disconcerted, he made up his mind that he would accustom himself to whatever should be required of him. Anyway, the lack of his usual habiliments was far from disagreeable in the dry, sultry air of this new world.

He slid from the couch to the floor, which was nearly five feet below him, and took several steps. He was not weak or dizzy, as he had half expected, but all his movements were characterized by the same sense of extreme bodily weight of which he had been dimly aware while still in a semi-conscious condition.

"The world in which you now dwell is somewhat larger than your own," explained Vizaphmal, "and the force of gravity is proportionately greater. Your weight has been increased by no less than a third; but I think you will soon become habituated to this, as well as to the other novelties of your situation."

Motioning the poet to follow him, he led the way through that portion of the

pavilion which had been behind Alvor's head as he lay on the couch. A spiral bridge of ascending stairs ran from this pavilion to a much larger pile where numerous wings and annexes of the same aerial architecture of domes and columns flared from a central edifice with a circular wall and many thin spires. Below the bridge, about the pavilion, and around the whole edifice above, were gardens of trees and flowers that caused Alvor to recall the things he had seen during his one experiment with hashish. The foliation of the trees was either very fine and hair-like, or else it consisted of huge, semi-globular and discoid forms depending from horizontal branches and suggesting a novel union of fruit and leaf. Almost all colors, even green, were shown in the bark and foliage of these trees. The flowers were mainly similar to those Alvor had seen from the pavilion, but there were others of a short, puffy-stemmed variety, with no trace of leaves, and with malignant purple-black heads full of crimson mouths, which swayed a little even when there was no wind. There were oval pools and meandering streams of a dark water with irisated glints all through this garden, which, with the columnar edifice, occupied the middle of a small plateau.

As ALVOR followed his guide along the bridge, a perspective of hills and plains all marked out in geometric diamonds and squares and triangles, with a large lake or island sea in their midst, was revealed momently. Far in the distance, more than a hundred leagues away, were the gleaming domes and towers of some baroque city, toward which the enormous orb of the sun was now declining. When he looked at this sun and saw the whole extent of its diameter for the first time, he felt an overpowering thrill of imaginative awe and wonder and exultation at the thought that it was identical with the red star to which he had addressed in another world the half-lyric, half-ironic lines of his ode.

At the end of the spiral bridge, they came to a second and more spacious pavilion, in which stood a high table with many seats attached to it by means of curving rods. Table and chairs were of the same material, a light, grayish metal. As they entered this pavilion, two strange beings appeared and bowed before Vizaphmal. They were like the scientist in their organic structure, but were not so tall, and their coloring was very drab and dark, with no hint of opalescence. By certain bizarre indications Alvor surmised that the two beings were of different sexes.

"You are right," said Vizaphmal, reading his thought. "These persons are a male and female of the two inferior sexes called Abbars, who constitute the workers, as well as the breeders, of our world. There are two superior sexes, who are sterile, and who form the intellectual, esthetic and ruling classes, to whom I belong. We call ourselves the Alphads. The Abbars are more numerous, but we hold them in close subjection; and even though they are our parents as well as our slaves, the ideas of filial piety which prevail in your world would be regarded as truly singular by us. We supervise their breeding, so that the due proportion of Abbars and Alphads may be maintained, and the character of the progeny is determined by the injection of certain serums at the time of conceiving. We ourselves, though sterile, are capable of what you call love, and our amorous delights are more complex than yours in their nature."

He now turned and addressed the two Abbars. The phonetic forms and combinations that issued from his lips were

unbelievably different from those of the scholarly English in which he had spoken to Alvor. There were strange gutturals and linguals and oddly prolonged vowels which Alvor, for all his subsequent attempts to learn the language, could never quite approximate and which argued a basic divergence in the structure of the vocal organs of Vizaphmal from that of his own.

Bowing till their heads almost touched the floor, the two Abbars disappeared among the columns in a wing of the building and soon returned, carrying long trays on which were unknown foods and beverages in utensils of unearthly forms.

"Be seated," said Vizaphmal. The meal that followed was far from unpleasant, and the foodstuffs were quite palatable, though Alvor was not sure whether they were meats or vegetables. He learned that they were really both, for his host explained that they were the prepared fruits of plants which were half animal in their cellular composition and characteristics. These plants grew wild, and were hunted with the same care that would be required in hunting dangerous beasts, on account of their mobile branches and the poisonous darts with which they were armed. The two beverages were a pale, colorless wine with an acrid flavor, made from a root, and a dusky, sweetish liquid, the natural water of this world. Alvor noticed that the water had a saline after-taste.

"The time has now come," announced Vizaphmal at the end of the meal, "to explain frankly the reason why I have brought you here. We will now adjourn to that portion of my home which you would term a laboratory, or workshop, and which also includes my library."

They passed through several pavilions and winding colonnades, and reached the circular wall at the core of the edifice. Here a high narrow door, engraved with heteroclitic ciphers, gave admission to a huge room without windows, lit by a yellow glow whose cause was not ascertainable.

"The walls and ceiling are lined with a radio-active substance," said Vizaphmal, "which affords this illumination. The vibrations of this substance are also highly stimulating to the processes of thought."

ALVOR looked about him at the room, which was filled with alembics and cupels and retorts and sundry other scientific mechanisms, all of unfamiliar types and materials. He could not even surmise their use. Beyond them, in a corner, he saw the apparatus of intersecting bars, with the two heavy disks, in which he and Vizaphmal had made their passage through etheric space. Around the walls there were a number of deep shelves, laden with great rolls that were like the volumes of the ancients.

Vizaphmal selected one of these rolls, and started to unfurl it. It was four feet wide, was gray in color, and was closely written with many columns of dark violet and maroon characters that ran horizontally instead of up and down.

"It will be necessary," said Vizaphmal, "to tell you a few facts regarding the history, religion and intellectual temper of our world, before I read to you the singular prophecy contained in one of the columns of this ancient chronicle.

"We are a very old people, and the beginnings, or even the first maturity of our civilization, antedate the appearance of the lowliest forms of life on your earth. Religious sentiment and the veneration of the past have always been dominant factors among us, and have shaped our history to an amazing extent. Even today, the whole mass of the Abbars and the majority of the Alphads are immersed

in superstition, and the veriest details of quotidian life are regulated by sacerdotal law. A few scientists and thinkers, like myself, are above all such puerilities; but, strictly between you and me, the Alphads, for all their superior and highly aristrocratic traits, are mainly the victims of arrested development in this regard. They have cultivated the epicurean and esthetic side of life to a high degree, they are accomplished artists, sybarites and able administrators or politicians; but, intellectually, they have not freed themselves from the chains of a sterile pantheism and an all too prolific hierarchy.

"Several cycles ago, in what might be called an early period of our history, the worship of all our sundry deities was at its height. There was at this time a veritable eruption, a universal plague of prophets, who termed themselves the voices of the gods, even as similarly-minded persons have done in your world. Each of these prophets made his own especial job-lot of predictions, often quite minutely worked out and elaborate, and sometimes far from lacking in imaginative quality. A number of these prophecies have since been fulfilled to the letter, which, as you may well surmise, has helped enormously in confirming the hold of religion. However, between ourselves, I suspect that their fulfilment has had behind it more or less of a shrewd instrumentality, supplied by those who could profit therefrom in one way or another.

"There was one vates, Abbolechiolor by name, who was even more fertile-minded and long-winded than his fellows. I shall now translate to you, from the volumen I have just enrolled, a prediction that he made in the year 299 of the cycle of Sargholoth, the third of the seven epochs into which our known history has been subdivided. It runs thus:

" 'When, for the second time following this prediction, the two outmost moons of Satabbor shall be simultaneously darkened in a total eclipse by the third and innermost moon, and when the dim night of this occultation shall have worn away in the dawn, a mighty wizard shall appear in the city of Sarpoulom, before the palace of the kings of Ulphalor, accompanied by a most unique and unheard-of monster with two arms, two legs, two eyes and a white skin. And he that then rules in Ulphalor shall be deposed ere noon of this day, and the wizard shall be enthroned in his place, to reign as long as the white monster shall abide with him.' "

Vizaphmal paused, as if to give Alvor a chance to cogitate the matters that had been presented to him. Then, while his three eyes assumed a look of quizzical sharpness and shrewdness, he continued:

"Since the promulgation of this prophecy, there has already been one total eclipse of our two outer moons by the inner one. And, according to all the calculations of our astronomers, in which I can find no possible flaw, a second similar eclipse is now about to take place—in fact, it is due this very night. If Abbolechiolor was truly inspired, tomorrow morn is the time when the prophecy will be fulfilled. However, I decided some while ago that its fulfilment should not be left to chance; and one of my purposes in designing the mechanism with which I visited your world, was to find a monster who would meet the specifications of Abbolechiolor. No creature of this anomalous kind has ever been known, or even fabled, to exist in Satabbor; and I made a thorough search of many remote and outlying planets without being able to obtain what I required. In some of these worlds there were monsters of very uncommon types, with an almost unlimited number of visual organs and limbs; but the variety to which you belong, with

only two eyes, two arms and two legs, must indeed be rare throughout the infragalactic universe, since I have not discovered it in any other planet than your own.

"I am sure that you now conceive the project I have long nurtured. You and I will appear at dawn in Sarpoulom, the capital of Ulphalor, whose domes and towers you saw this afternoon far off on the plain. Because of the celebrated prophecy, and the publicly known calculations regarding the imminence of a second two-fold eclipse, a great crowd will doubtless be gathered before the palace of the kings to await whatever shall occur. Akkiel, the present king, is by no means popular, and your advent in company with me, who am widely famed as a wizard, will be the signal for his dethronement. I shall then be ruler in his place, even as Abbolechiolor has so thoughtfully predicted. The holding of supreme temporal power in Ulphalor is not undesirable, even for one who is wise and learned and above most of the vanities of life, as I am. When this honor has devolved upon my unworthy shoulders, I shall be able to offer you, as a reward for your miraculous aid, an existence of rare and sybaritic luxury, of rich and varied sensation, such as you can hardly have imagined. It is true, no doubt, that you will be doomed to a certain loneliness among us: you will always be looked upon as a monster, a portentous anomaly; but such, I believe, was your lot in the world where I found you and where you were about to cast yourself into a most unpleasant river. There, as you have learned, all poets are regarded as no less anomalous than double-headed snakes or five-legged calves."

Alvor had listened to this speech in manifold and ever-increasing amazement. Toward the end, when there was no longer any doubt concerning Vizaphmal's intention, he felt the sting of a bitter and curious irony at the thought of the rôle he was destined to play. However, he could do no less than admit the cogency of Vizaphmal's final argument.

"I trust," said Vizaphmal, "that I have not injured your feelings by my frankness, or by the position in which I am about to place you."

"Oh, no, not at all," Alvor hastened to assure him.

"In that case, we shall soon begin our journey to Sarpoulom, which will take all night. Of course, we could make the trip in the flash of an instant with my space-annihilator, or in a few minutes with one of the air-machines that have long been employed among us. But I intend to use a very old-fashioned mode of conveyance for the occasion, so that we will arrive in the proper style, at the proper time, and also that you may enjoy our scenery and view the double eclipse at leisure."

WHEN they emerged from the windowless room, the colonnades and pavilions without were full of a rosy light, though the sun was still an hour above the horizon. This, Alvor learned, was the usual prelude of a Satabborian sunset. He and Vizaphmal watched while the whole landscape before them became steeped in the ruddy glow, which deepened through shades of cinnabar and ruby to a rich garnet by the time Antares had begun to sink from sight. When the huge orb had disappeared, the intervening lands took on a fiery amethyst, and tall auroral flames of a hundred hues shot upward to the zenith from the sunken sun. Alvor was spellbound by the glory of the spectacle.

Turning from this magnificent display at an unfamiliar sound, he saw that a singular vehicle had been brought by the

Abbars to the steps of the pavilion in which they stood. It was more like a chariot than anything else, and was drawn by three animals undreamt of in human fable or heraldry. These animals were black and hairless, their bodies were extremely long, each of them had eight legs and a forked tail, and their whole aspect, including their flat, venomous, triangular heads, was uncomfortably serpentine. A series of green and scarlet wattles hung from their throats and bellies, and semi-translucent membranes, erigible at will, were attached to their sides.

"You behold," Vizaphmal informed Alvor, "the traditional conveyance that has been used since time immemorial by all orthodox wizards in Ulphalor. These creatures are called *orpods,* and they are among the swiftest of our mammalian serpents."

He and Alvor seated themselves in the vehicle. Then the three *orpods,* who had no reins in all their complicated harness, started off at a word of command on a spiral road that ran from Vizaphmal's home to the plain beneath. As they went, they erected the membranes at their sides and soon attained an amazing speed.

Now, for the first time, Alvor saw the three moons of Satabbor, which had risen opposite the afterglow. They were all large, especially the innermost one, a perceptible warmth was shed by their pink rays, and their combined illumination was nearly as clear and bright as that of a terrestrial day.

The land through which Vizaphmal and the poet now passed was uninhabited, in spite of its nearness to Sarpoulom, and they met no one. Alvor learned that the terraces he had seen upon awaking were not the work of intelligent beings, as he had thought, but were a natural formation of the hills. Vizaphmal had chosen this location for his home because of the solitude and privacy, so desirable for the scientific experiments to which he had devoted himself.

After they had traversed many leagues, they began to pass occasional houses, of a like structure to that of Vizaphmal's. Then the road meandered along the rim of cultivated fields, which Alvor recognized as the source of the geometric divisions he had seen from afar during the day. He was told that these fields were given mainly to the growing of root-vegetables, of a gigantic truffle, and a kind of succulent cactus, which formed the chief foods of the Abbars. The Alphads ate by choice only the meat of animals and the fruits of wild, half-animal plants, such as those with which Alvor had been served.

By midnight the three moons had drawn very close together and the second moon had begun to occlude the outermost. Then the inner moon came slowly across the others, till in an hour's time the eclipse was complete. The diminution of light was very marked, and the whole effect was now similar to that of a moonlit night on earth.

"It will be morning in a little more than two hours," said Vizaphmal, "since our nights are extremely short at this time of year. The eclipse will be over before then. But there is no need for us to hurry."

He spoke to the *orpods,* who folded their membranes and settled to a sort of trot.

Sarpoulom was now visible in the heart of the plain, and its outlines were rendered more distinct as the two hidden moons began to draw forth from the adumbration of the other. When to this triple light the ruby rays of earliest morn were added, the city loomed upon the travelers with fantastic many-storied piles of that same open type of metal architec-

ture which the home of Vizaphmal had displayed. This architecture, Alvor found, was general throughout the land, though an older type with closed walls was occasionally to be met with, and was used altogether in the building of prisons and the inquisitions maintained by the priesthoods of the various deities.

It was an incredible vision that Alvor saw—a vision of high domes upborne on slender elongated columns, tier above tier, of airy colonnades and bridges and hanging gardens loftier than Babylon or than Babel, all tinged by the ever-changing red that accompanied and followed the Satabborian dawn, even as it had preceded the sunset. Into this vision, along streets that were paven with the same metal as that of the buildings, Alvor and Vizaphmal were drawn by the three *orpods*.

The poet was overcome by the sense of an unimaginably old and alien and diverse life which descended upon him from these buildings. He was surprized to find that the streets were nearly deserted and that little sign of activity was manifest anywhere. A few Abbars, now and then, scuttled away in alleys or entrances at the approach of the *orpods*, and two beings of a coloration similar to that of Vizaphmal, one of whom Alvor took to be a female, issued from a colonnade and stood staring at the travelers in evident stupefaction.

When they had followed a sort of winding avenue for more than a mile, Alvor saw between and above the edifices in front of them the domes and upper tiers of a building that surpassed all the others in its extent.

"You now behold the palace of the kings of Ulphalor," his companion told him.

In a little while they emerged upon a great square that surrounded the palace. This square was crowded with the people of the city, who, as Vizaphmal had surmised, were all gathered to await the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the prophecy of Abbolechiolor. The open galleries and arcades of the huge edifice, which rose to a height of ten stories, were also laden with watching figures. Abbars were the most plentiful element in this throng, but there were also multitudes of the gayly colored Alphads among them.

At sight of Alvor and his companion, a perceptible movement, a sort of communal shuddering which soon grew convulsive, ran through the whole assemblage in the square and along the galleries of the edifice above. Loud cries of a peculiar shrillness and harshness arose, there was a strident sound of beaten metal in the heart of the palace, like the gongs of an alarm, and mysterious lights glowed out and were extinguished in the higher stories. Clangors of unknown machines, the moan and roar and shriek of strange instruments, were audible above the clamor of the crowd, which grew more tumultuous and agitated in its motion. A way was opened for the car drawn by the three *orpods*, and Vizaphmal and Alvor were soon at the entrance of the palace.

There was an unreality about it all to Alvor, and the discomfiture he had felt in drawing upon himself the weird phosphoric gaze of ten thousand eyes, all of whom were now intent with a fearsome uncanny curiosity on every detail of his physique, was like the discomfiture of some absurd and terrible dream. The movement of the crowd had ceased, while the car was passing along the unhuman lane that had been made for it, and there was an interval of silence. Then, once more, there were babble and debate, and cries that had the accent of martial orders or summonses were caught up and re-

peated. The throng began to move, with a new and more concentric swirling, and the foremost ranks of Abbars and Alphads swelled like a dark and tinted wave into the colonnades of the palace. They climbed the pillars with a dreadful swift agility to the stories above, they thronged the courts and pavilions and arcades, and though a weak resistance was apparently put up by those within, there was nothing that could stem them.

Through all this clangor and clamor and tumult, Vizaphmal stood in the car with an imperturbable mien beside the poet. Soon a number of Alphads, evidently a delegation, issued from the palace and made obeisance to the wizard, whom they addressed in humble and supplicative tones.

"A revolution has been precipitated by our advent," explained Vizaphmal, "and Akkiel the king has fled. The chamberlains of the court and the high priests of all our local deities are now offering me the throne of Ulphalor. Thus the prophecy is being fulfilled to the letter. You must agree with me that the great Abbolechiolor was happily inspired."

3

THE ceremony of Vizaphmal's enthronement was held almost immediately, in a huge hall at the core of the palace, open like all the rest of the structure, and with columns of colossal size. The throne was a great globe of azure metal, with a seat hollowed out near the top, accessible by means of a serpentine flight of stairs. Alvor, at an order issued by the wizard, was allowed to stand at the base of this globe with some of the Alphads.

The enthronement itself was quite simple. The wizard mounted the stairs, amid the silence of a multitude that had thronged the hall, and seated himself in the hollow of the great globe. Then a very tall and distinguished-looking Alphad also climbed the steps, carrying a heavy rod, one half of which was green, and the other a swart, sullen crimson, and placed this rod in the hands of Vizaphmal. Later, Alvor was told that the crimson end of this rod could emit a death-dealing ray, and the green a vibration that cured almost all the kinds of illness to which the Satabborians were subject. Thus it was more than symbolical of the twofold power of life and death with which the king had been invested.

The ceremony was now at an end, and the gathering quickly dispersed. Alvor, at the command of Vizaphmal, was installed in a suite of open apartments on the third story of the palace, at the end of many labyrinthin stairs. A dozen Abbars, who were made his personal retainers, soon came in, each carrying a different food or drink. The foods were beyond belief in their strangeness, for they included the eggs of a moth-like insect large as a plover, and the apples of a fungoid tree that grew in the craters of dead volcanoes. They were served in ewers of a white and shining mineral, upborne on legs of fantastic length, and wrought with a cunning artistry. Likewise he was given, in shallow bowls, a liquor made from the blood-like juice of living plants, and a wine in which the narcotic pollen of some night-blooming flower had been dissolved.

The days and weeks that now followed were, for the poet, an experience beyond the visionary resources of any terrestrial drug. Step by step, he was initiated, as much as possible for one so radically alien, into the complexities and singularities of life in a new world. Gradually his nerves and his mind, by the aid of the erubescent liquid which Vizaphmal continued to administer to him at inter-

vals, became habituated to the strong light and heat, the intense radiative properties of a soil and atmosphere with unearthly chemical constituents, the strange foods and beverages, and the people themselves with their queer anatomy and queerer customs. Tutors were engaged to teach him the language, and, in spite of the difficulties presented by certain unmanageable consonants, certain weird ululative vowels, he learned enough of it to make his simpler ideas and wants understood.

He saw Vizaphmal every day, and the new king seemed to cherish a real gratitude toward him for his indispensable aid in the fulfilment of the prophecy. Vizaphmal took pains to instruct him in regard to all that it was necessary to know, and kept him well-informed as to the progress of public events in Ulphalor. He was told, among other things, that no news had been heard concerning the whereabouts of Akkiel, the late ruler. Also, Vizaphmal had reason to be aware of more or less opposition toward himself on the part of the various priesthoods, who, in spite of his life-long discretion, had somehow learned of his free-thinking propensities.

For all the attention, kindness and service that he received, and the unique luxury with which he was surrounded, Alvor felt that these people, even as the wizard had forewarned him, looked upon him merely as a kind of unnatural curiosity or anomaly. He was no less monstrous to them than they were to him, and the gulf created by the laws of a diverse biology, by an alien trend of evolution, seemed impossible to bridge in any manner. He was questioned by many of them, and, in especial, by more than one delegation of noted scientists, who desired to know as much as he could tell them about himself. But the queries were so patronizing, so rude and narrow-minded and scornful and smug, that he was soon wont to feign a total ignorance of the language on such occasions. Indeed, there was a gulf; and he was rendered even more acutely conscious of it whenever he met any of the female Abbars or Alphads of the court, who eyed him with disdainful inquisitiveness, and among whom a sort of tittering usually arose when he passed. His naked members, so limited in number, were obviously as great a source of astonishment to them as their own somewhat intricate and puzzling charms were to him. All of them were quite nude; indeed, nothing, not even a string of jewels or a single gem, was ever worn by any of the Satabborians. The female Alphads, like the males, were extremely tall and were gorgeous with epidermic hues that would have outdone the plumage of any peacock; and their anatomical structure was most peculiar. . . . Alvor began to feel the loneliness of which Vizaphmal had spoken, and he was overcome at times by a great nostalgia for his own world, by a planetary homesickness. He became atrociously nervous, even if not actually ill.

While he was still in this condition, Vizaphmal took him on a tour of Ulphalor that had become necessary for political reasons. More or less incredulity concerning the real existence of such a monstrosity as Alvor had been expressed by the folk of outlying provinces, of the polar realms and the antipodes, and the new ruler felt that a visual demonstration of the two-armed, two-legged and two-eyed phenomenon would be far from inadvisable, to establish beyond dispute the legitimacy of his own claim to the throne. In the course of this tour, they visited many unique cities, and rural and urban centers of industries peculiar to Satabbor; and Alvor saw the mines from which the

countless minerals and metals used in Ulphalor were extracted by the toil of millions of Abbars. These metals were found in a pure state, and were of inexhaustible extent. Also, he saw the huge oceans, which, with certain inland seas and lakes that were fed from underground sources, formed the sole water-supply of the aging planet, where no rain had even been rumored to fall for centuries. The sea-water, after undergoing a treatment that purged it of a number of undesirable elements, was carried all through the land by a system of conduits. Moreover, he saw the marshlands at the north pole, with their vicious tangle of animate vegetation, into which no one had ever tried to penetrate.

They met many outland peoples in the course of this tour; but the general characteristics were the same throughout Ulphalor, except in one or two races of the lowest aborigines, among whom there were no Alphads. Everywhere the poet was eyed with the same cruel and ignorant curiosity that had been shown in Sarpoulom. However, he became gradually inured to this, and the varying spectacles of bizarre interest and the unheard-of scenes that he saw daily, helped to divert him a little from his nostalgia for the lost earth.

When he and Vizaphmal returned to Sarpoulom, after an absence of many weeks, they found that much discontent and revolutionary sentiment had been sown among the multitude by the hierarchies of the Satabborian gods and goddesses, particularly by the priesthood of Cunthamosi, the Cosmic Mother, a female deity in high favor among the two reproductive sexes, from whom the lower ranks of her hierophants were recruited. Cunthamosi was worshipped as the source of all things: her maternal organs were believed to have given birth to the sun, the moon, the world, the stars, the planets, and even the meteors which often fell in Satabbor. But it was argued by her priests that such a monstrosity as Alvor could not possibly have issued from her womb, and that therefore his very existence was a kind of blasphemy, and that the rule of the heretic wizard, Vizaphmal, based on the advent of this abnormality, was likewise a flagrant insult to the Cosmic Mother. They did not deny the apparently miraculous fulfilment of the prophecy of Abbolechiolor, but it was maintained that this fulfilment was no assurance of the perpetuity of Vizaphmal's reign, and no proof that his reign was countenanced by any of the gods.

"I can not conceal from you," said Vizaphmal to Alvor, "that the position in which we both stand is now slightly parlous. I intend to bring the space-annihilator from my country home to the court, since it is not impossible that I may have need for it, and that some foreign sphere will soon become more salubrious for me than my native one."

However, it would seem that this able scientist, alert wizard and competent king had not altogether grasped the real imminence of the danger that threatened his reign; or else he spoke, as was sometimes his wont, with sardonic moderation. He showed no further concern, beyond setting a strong guard about Alvor to attend him at all times, lest an attempt should be made to kidnap the poet in consideration of the last clause of the prophecy.

THREE days after the return to Sarpoulom, while Alvor was standing in one of his private balconies looking out over the roofs of the town, with his guards chattering idly in the rooms behind, he saw that the streets were dark with a horde of people, mainly Abbars,

who were streaming silently toward the palace. A few Alphads, distinguishable even at a distance by their gaudy hues, were at the head of this throng. Alarmed at the spectacle, and remembering what the king had told him, he went to find Vizaphmal and climbed the eternal tortuous series of complicated stairs that led to the king's personal suite. Others among the inmates of the court had seen the advancing crowd, and there were agitation, terror and frantic hurry everywhere. Mounting the last flight of steps to the king's threshold, Alvor was astounded to find that many of the Abbars, who had gained ingress from the other side of the palace and had scaled the successive rows of columns and stairs with ape-like celerity, were already pouring into the room. Vizaphmal himself was standing before the open framework of the space-annihilator, which had now been installed beside his couch. The rod of royal investiture was in his hand, and he was levelling the crimson end at the foremost of the invading Abbars. As this creature leapt toward him, waving an atrocious weapon lined by a score of hooked blades, Vizaphmal tightened his hold on the rod, thus pressing a secret spring, and a thin rose-colored ray of light was emitted from the end, causing the Abbar to crumple and fall. Others, in nowise deterred, ran forward to succeed him, and the king turned his lethal beam upon them with the calm air of one who is conducting a scientific experiment, till the floor was piled with dead Abbars. Still others took their place, and some began to cast their hooked weapons at the king. None of these touched him, but he seemed to weary of the sport, and stepping within the framework, he closed it upon himself. A moment more, and then there was a roar as of a thousand thunders, and the mechanism and Vizaphmal were no longer to be seen. Never, at any future time, was the poet to learn what had become of him, nor in what stranger world than Satabbor he was now indulging his scientific fancies and curiosities.

Alvor had no time to feel, as he might conceivably have done, that he had been basely deserted by the king. All the nether and upper stories of the great edifice were now a-swarm with the invading crowd, who were no longer silent, but were uttering shrill, ferocious cries as they bore down the opposition of the courtiers and slaves. The whole place was inundated by an ever-mounting sea, in which there were now myriads of Alphads as well as of Abbars; and no escape was possible. In a few instants, Alvor himself was seized by a group of the Abbars, who seemed to have been enraged rather than terrified or discomforted by the vanishing of Vizaphmal. He recognized them as priests of Cunthamosi by an odd oval and vertical marking of red pigments on their swart bodies. They bound him viciously with cords that were made from the intestines of a dragon-like animal, and carried him away from the palace, along streets that were lined by a staring and gibbering mob, to a building on the southern outskirts of Sarpoulom, which Vizaphmal had once pointed out to him as the Inquisition of the Cosmic Mother.

This edifice, unlike most of the buildings in Sarpoulom, was walled on all sides and was constructed entirely of enormous gray bricks, made from the local soil, and bigger and harder than blocks of granite. In a long five-sided chamber illumined only by narrow slits in the roof, Alvor found himself arraigned before a jury of the priests, presided over by a swollen and pontifical-looking Alphad, the Grand Inquisitor.

The place was filled with ingenious and grotesque implements of torture, and the

very walls were hung to the ceiling with contrivances that would have put Torquemada to shame. Some of them were very small, and were designed for the treatment of special and separate nerves; and others were intended to harrow the entire epidermic area of the body at a single twist of their screw-like mechanism.

Alvor could understand little of the charges that were preferred against him, but gathered that they were the same, or included the same, of which Vizaphmal had spoken—to wit, that he, Alvor, was a monstrosity that could never have been conceived or brought forth by Cunthamosi, and whose very existence, past, present and future, was a dire affront to this divinity. The entire scene—the dark and lurid room with its array of hellish instruments, the diabolic faces of the inquisitors, and the high unhuman drone of their voices as they intoned the charges and brought judgment against Alvor— was laden with a horror beyond the horror of dreams.

Presently the Grand Inquisitor focussed the malign gleam of his three unblinking orbs upon the poet, and began to pronounce an interminable sentence, pausing a little at quite regular intervals which seemed to mark the clauses of the punishment that was to be inflicted. These clauses were well-nigh innumerable, but Alvor could comprehend almost nothing of what was said; and doubtless it was as well that he did not comprehend.

When the voice of the swollen Alphad had ceased, the poet was led away through endless corridors and down a stairway that seemed to descend into the bowels of Satabbor. These corridors, and also the stairway, were luminous with self-emitted light that resembled the phosphorescence of decaying matter in tombs and catacombs. As Alvor went downward with his guards, who were all Abbars of the lowest type, he could hear somewhere in sealed unknowable vaults the moan and shriek of beings who endured the ordeals imposed by the inquisitors of Cunthamosi.

They came to the final step of the stairway, where, in a vast vault, an abyss whose bottom was not discernible yawned in the center of the floor. On its edge there stood a fantastic sort of windlass on which was wound an immense coil of blackish rope.

The end of this rope was now tied about Alvor's ankles, and he was lowered head downward into the gulf by the inquisitors. The sides were not luminous like those of the stairway, and he could see nothing. But, as he descended into the gulf, the terrible discomfort of his position was increased by sensations of an ulterior origin. He felt that he was passing through a kind of hairy material with numberless filaments that clung to his head and body and limbs like minute tentacles, and whose contact gave rise to an immediate itching. The substance impeded him more and more, till at last he was held immovably suspended as in a net, and all the while the separate hairs seemed to be biting into his flesh with a million microscopic teeth, till the initial itching was followed by a burning and a deep convulsive throbbing more exquisitely painful than the flames of an *auto da fe*. The poet learned long afterward that the material into which he had been lowered was a subterranean organism, half vegetable, half animal, which grew from the side of the gulf, with long mobile feelers that were extremely poisonous to the touch. But at the time, not the least of the horrors he underwent was the uncertainty as to its precise nature.

After he had hung for quite a while in this agonizing web, and had become almost unconscious from the pain and the unnatural position, Alvor felt that he was being drawn upward. A thousand of the fine thread-like tentacles clung to him and his whole body was encircled with a mesh of insufferable pangs as he broke loose from them. He swooned with the intensity of this pain, and when he recovered, he was lying on the floor at the edge of the gulf, and one of the priests was prodding him with a many-pointed weapon.

Alvor gazed for a moment at the cruel visages of his tormenters, in the luminous glow from the sides of the vault, and wondered dimly what infernal torture was next to follow, in the carrying-out of the interminable sentence that had been pronounced. He surmised, of course, that the one he had just undergone was mild in comparison to the many that would succeed it. But he never knew, for at that instant there came a crashing sound like the fall and shattering of the universe; the walls, the floor and the stairway rocked to and fro in a veritable convulsion, and the vault above was riven in sunder, letting through a rain of fragments of all sizes, some of which struck several of the inquisitors and swept them into the gulf. Others of the priests leapt over the edge in their terror, and the two who remained were in no condition to continue their official duties. Both of them were lying beside Alvor with broken heads from which, in lieu of blood, there issued a glutinous light-green liquid.

Alvor could not imagine what had happened, but knew only that he himself was unhurt, as far as the results of the cataclysm were concerned. His mental state was not one to admit of scientific surmise: he was sick and dizzy from the ordeal he had suffered, and his whole body was swollen, was blood-red and violently burning from the touch of the organisms in the gulf. He had, however, enough strength and presence of mind to grope with his bound hands for the weapon that had been dropped by one of the inquisitors. By much patience, by untiring ingenuity, he was able to cut the thongs about his wrists and ankles on the sharp blade of one of the five points.

Carrying this weapon, which he knew that he might need, he began the ascent of the subterranean stairway. The steps were half blocked by fallen masses of stone, and some of the landings and stairs, as well as the sides of the wall, were cloven with enormous rents; and his egress was by no means an easy matter. When he reached the top, he found that the whole edifice was a pile of shattered walls, with a great pit in its center from which a cloud of vapors issued. An immense meteor had fallen, and had struck the Inquisition of the Cosmic Mother.

Alvor was in no condition to appreciate the irony of this event, but at least he was able to comprehend his chance of freedom. The only inquisitors now visible were lying with squashed bodies whose heads or feet protruded from beneath the large squares of overthrown brick, and Alvor lost no time in quitting the vicinity.

It was now night, and only one of the three moons had arisen. Alvor struck off through the level arid country to the south of Sarpoulom, where no one dwelt, with the idea of crossing the boundaries of Ulphalor into one of the independent kingdoms that lay below the equator. He remembered Vizaphmal telling him once that the people of these kingdoms were more enlightened and less priest-ridden than those of Ulphalor.

All night he wandered, in a sort of daze that was at times delirium. The

pain of his swollen limbs increased, and he grew feverish. The moonlit plain seemed to shift and waver before him, but was interminable as the landscape of a hashish-dream. Presently the other two moons arose, and in the overtaxed condition of his mind and nerves, he was never quite sure as to their actual number. Usually, there appeared to be more than three, and this troubled him prodigiously. He tried to resolve the problem for hours, as he staggered on, and at last, a little before dawn, he became altogether delirious.

He was unable afterward to recall anything about his subsequent journey. Something impelled him to go on even when his thews were dead and his brain an utter blank: he knew nothing of the waste and terrible lands through which he roamed in the hour-long ruby-red of morn and beneath a furnace-like sun; nor did he know when he crossed the equator at sunset and entered Omanorion, the realm of the empress Ambiala, still carrying in his hand the five-pointed weapon of one of the dead inquisitors.

4

It was night when Alvor awoke, but he had no means of surmising that it was not the same night in which he had fled from the Inquisition of the Cosmic Mother; and that many Satabborian days had gone by since he had fallen totally exhausted and unconscious within the boundary-line of Omanorion. The warm, rosy beams of the three moons were full in his face, but he could not know whether they were ascending or declining. Anyhow, he was lying on a very comfortable couch that was not quite so disconcertingly long and high as the one upon which he had first awakened in Ulphalor. He was in an open pavilion, and this pavilion was also a bower of multitudinous blossoms which leaned toward him with faces that were both grotesque and weirdly beautiful, from vines that had scaled the columns, or from the many curious metal pots that stood upon the floor. The air that he breathed was a medley of perfumes more exotic than frangipani; they were extravagantly sweet and spicy, but somehow he did not find them oppressive. Rather, they served to augment the deep, delightful languor of all his sensations.

As he opened his eyes and turned a little on the couch, a female Alphad, not so tall as those of Ulphalor and really quite of his own stature, came out from behind the flower-pots and addressed him. Her language was not that of the Ulphalorians, it was softer and less utterly unhuman, and though he could not understand a word, he was immediately aware of a sympathetic note or undertone which, so far, he had never heard on the lips of any one in this world, not even Vizaphmal.

He replied in the language of Ulphalor, and found that he was understood. He and the female Alphad now carried on as much of a conversation as Alvor's linguistic abilities would permit. He learned that he was talking to the empress Ambiala, the sole and supreme ruler of Omanorion, a quite extensive realm contiguous to Ulphalor. She told him that some of her servitors, while out hunting the wild, ferocious, half-animal fruits of the region, had found him lying unconscious near a thicket of the deadly plants that bore these fruits, and had brought him to her palace in Lompior, the chief city of Omanorion. There, while he still lay in a week-long stupor, he had been treated with medicaments that had now almost cured the painful swellings resultant from his plunge among the hair-like organism in the Inquisition.

With genuine courtesy, the empress forbore to question the poet regarding himself, nor did she express any surprize at his anatomical peculiarities. However, her whole manner gave evidence of an eager and even fascinated interest, for she did not take her eyes away from him at any time. He was a little embarrassed by her intent scrutiny, and to cover this embarrassment, as well as to afford her the explanations due to so kind a hostess, he tried to tell her as much as he could of his own history and adventures. It was doubtful if she understood more than half of what he said, but even this half obviously lent him an increasingly portentous attraction in her eyes. All of her three orbs grew round with wonder at the tale related by this fantastic Ulysses, and whenever he stopped she would beg him to go on. The garnet and ruby and cinnabar gradations of the dawn found Alvor still talking and the empress Ambiala still listening.

In the full light of Antares, Alvor saw that his hostess was, from a Satabborian viewpoint, a really beautiful and exquisite creature. The iridescence of her coloring was very soft and subtle, her arms and legs, though of the usual number, were all voluptuously rounded, and the features of her face were capable of a wide range of expression. Her usual look, however, was one of a sad and wistful yearning. This look Alvor came to understand, when, with a growing knowledge of her language, he learned that she too was a poet, that she had always been troubled by vague desires for the exotic and the far-off, and that she was thoroughly bored with everything in Omanorion, and especially with the male Alphads of that region, none of whom could rightfully boast of having been her lover even for a day. Alvor's biological difference from these males was evidently the secret of his initial fascination for her.

The poet's life in the palace of Ambiala, where he found that he was looked upon as a permanent guest, was from the beginning much more agreeable than his existence in Ulphalor had been. For one thing, there was Ambiala herself, who impressed him as being infinitely more intelligent than the females of Sarpoulom, and whose attitude was so thoughtful and sympathetic and admiring, in contra-distinction to the attitude of these aforesaid females. Also, the servitors of the palace and the people of Lompior, though they doubtless regarded Alvor as a quite singular sort of being, were at least more tolerant than the Ulphalorians; and he met with no manner of rudeness among them at any time. Moreover, if there were any priesthoods in Omanorion, they were not of the uncompromising type he had met north of the equator, and it would seem that nothing was to be feared from them. No one ever spoke of religion to Alvor in this ideal realm, and somehow he never actually learned whether or not Omanorion possessed any gods or hierarchies. Remembering his ordeal in the Inquisition of the Cosmic Mother, he was quite willing not to broach the subject, anyway.

Alvor made rapid progress in the language of Omanorion, since the empress herself was his teacher. He soon learned more and more about her ideas and tastes, about her romantic love for the triple moonlight, and the odd flowers that she cultivated with so much care and so much delectation. These blossoms were rare anywhere in Satabbor: some of them were anemones that came from the tops of almost inaccessible mountains many leagues in height, and others were forms inconceivably more bizarre than orchids,

(Please turn to page 143)

From the Dark Halls of Hell

By G. G. PENDARVES

A story of sinister powers and evil magic—of dark forces raised to accomplish an evil purpose

"IT'S no use, Erzebet! Why don't you give up this game you're playing? Hugh is not the man for you, you know—you *must* know he could never make you happy."

"And you could!" replied Erzebet Machik, with a short laugh. Her hands, those marvelous hands of hers, were folded in her lap as she sat like a Buddha—detached and apparently serene.

"I am. Yes, I am! I am your man, and you are my woman. I know you as no one else ever could. Since your childhood, year in, year out, in every mood I have known you—and loved you, Erzebet."

The long, smoldering black eyes of the girl softened.

"You've been a good friend, Rafe," she admitted. "But more than a friend . . . no. Hugh is the man I want. I must, I will have him!"

"Heaven help both of you if he marries you. He's reserved, proud, conventional—an aristocrat. And you——!"

She flared up, her head thrust forward on her long neck, her dark face quite gray with fury.

"Go on—go on! Say the rest! I am only the daughter of a Hungarian—an apostate Jew—a devil-worshipper who was hanged at Budapest for——"

The man laughed.

"As if I care who or what he was! All I know or care about is that you are the greatest violinist of the day, and beautiful . . . beautiful . . . God, but how beautiful!"

"You said that he was an aristocrat . . . and you meant . . . you meant——"

"I meant he has all the pride and prejudices and conventions of his class. You are a great genius—brilliant, Bohemian, moody, and changeable as the sea. You have nothing—nothing in common with this man, Hugh Bremner, I repeat."

"But that is exactly the reason why I love him, because he is so different from myself. I adore his calm . . . his poise! He is like a rock. I love everything about him, Rafe. It's no use arguing and scolding me. If you understand me as you say you do, you would understand why I care for him."

"I understand that you are attracted for a time." His voice was very bitter. "But I know you better than you know yourself, Erzebet. You can't give up your career. You can't give up your birthright to live like a tame bird in a cage. You are an eagle—you must be free to soar—to fly everywhere . . . anywhere! I—I am a musician too. I am of your race, your people—and I *know* you!"

She flicked at a sheaf of music impatiently.

"How about trying over this aria again, Rafe? That syncopated minor bit was wooden at the rehearsal this morning. We've just time before dinner."

The man leaned across from the chair at her side, and took her hands gently in his own. The girl let them lie passively; her somber eyes did not flinch from his.

"I like you, Rafe. But . . . I can live

"It's her . . . she's here . . . she . . . how devilish!"

without you. I can not live without Hugh! I can not . . . I will not!"

Suddenly she wrenched her hands away and stood up. Drama, passion, strong glowing life showed in every line and movement. With a savage instinctive gesture she struck her breast with one clenched fist.

"Do you think that I don't know that he does not love me—has never loved me? That he begins to fear . . . to hate me! But I love him . . . love him! I will never give him up in this world . . . or the next!"

The man watched her with hungry, adoring eyes.

"I will never give *you* up," he responded hoarsely, his arms suddenly about her, his lips on hers.

A ring at the front door of her apartment interrupted them.

"Will you answer?" Erzebet said coolly, turning toward a long mirror on the wall. "My maids are both out."

"Hugh!"

The tall fair man who entered and took her outstretched hands, looked strained and set. His gray eyes were clouded, and he met her eager welcome with an embarrassed reserve. Two angry little flames lit up in the girl's dark eyes—flickering, sullen reflections of the hell-fires which consumed her.

She flung herself down on a divan and

began to smoke, watching Hugh through half-shut eyelids . . . waiting . . . watching.

"Give me a few minutes alone with her, old man," Hugh had said to Rafe Horvath at the door. But now his opportunity was come, Hugh longed to escape.

He lit a cigarette, dropped the lighted match on the Persian rug at his feet, apologized, gave a few nervous puffs, then crushed out the glowing tip of his cigarette on a jade ash-tray.

"Erzebet, this is going to be . . . this will sound as if—I mean . . . I am afraid you may misunderstand my motive in saying what I've come here to say to you."

She waited, blowing clouds of tobacco smoke, her half-closed eyes gleaming in the pallor of her face.

He lit another cigarette in desperate embarrassment. His strong, athletic, out-of-doors figure in country tweeds looked incongruous in Erzebet's exotic studio, so full of flowers, costly draperies, cushions, rugs, and futuristic pictures and china. His old-fashioned air of courtesy, the breeding and restraint so natural to him, made the girl's pose of impassivity seem tawdry and theatrical.

"Well, Hugh?" Her voice was rough with fear and anxiety.

His eyes met hers as she leaned toward him suddenly. Unconsciously his pulses quickened; in spite of himself his arms went out to clasp her; her black eyes drew him . . . drew him! His senses swam, he felt he was drowning in the velvet depths of those languorous eyes. Her red lips were close to his.

"What is it, my darling?"

At the sound of her voice, low and throbbing as the rich tones of her own Cremona, Hugh drew back, white and shaken. Her beauty enslaved him, drew him like a spell. But under the cloak of the rich dark loveliness he saw another Erzebet—he glimpsed a personality which repelled him utterly.

For months he had fought against the intuition which warned him to see Erzebet no more. He knew at last quite definitely that the spell this woman put upon him was not, never had been, love.

"It's a difficult thing to ask you," he began haltingly. "But you know, I think you realize that I . . . that you and I——"

Erzebet drew back, her face set like flint.

"You would have told me this yourself in a short time. But I can't—can't go on any longer now. You've been marvelous to put up with me all this time. I know you don't really care . . . there are so many other men . . . you have the world at your feet . . . and I . . . I——"

"Yes." The woman leaned far back on her silken cushions, her eyes almost closed.

"It was a mistake. We made a big mistake, you and I. I did not know—could not know until——"

"You met *her.*" A bitter, mocking voice completed his sentence for him.

"Yes." Hugh's stumbling speech became more resolute. The thought of Cynthia steeled him to fresh effort. "You do not love me, Erzebet. I am only one of your playthings for an idle hour. You are a great genius, brilliant, beautiful, a darling of the gods. I am an ordinary, commonplace man, and I can't live long on your giddy heights."

Reassured by her quiet stillness, he went on:

"Tell people what you like. Say you have broken our engagement for any reason you choose. I am in your hands absolutely as far as that goes . . . in your hands."

She smiled—a sudden dazzling smile that startled Hugh.

"In my hands!" she echoed. "In my hands! Yes, I think that is very true."

Hugh smiled too in his relief.

"You do understand, then. You'll let me go?"

Erzebet rose in a sinuous movement to her feet. With the deadly swiftness of a poisonous reptile, she struck out at him.

"Let you go! Go . . . go . . . now, at once! I wish only *never* to see you again! Go! You are not a man . . . you are only a crawling dusty little worm at my feet! Go . . . go . . . go!"

She stood there, raging, furious, primitive as when she was picked up in the gutters of Budapest twelve years ago. Anger stripped her of all her superficial veneer of fine manners, the regal dignity she had acquired so painfully. The old Erzebet—the dirty ragged homeless little waif—stood there convulsed with fury, shrieking, gesticulating, and primitive.

"Go——" she choked.

"In my hands!" she muttered, as the door closed behind the man. "Yes, Hugh Bremner . . . in my hands!"

She opened and closed her long fingers with an indescribable gesture of malice.

"And unless I have forgotten much of my power, these hands shall hold you fast! So help me, great Chavajoth!"

2

THREE days since he had heard or seen anything of either Hugh or Erzebet! Rafe wondered. He had rung up the latter several times, but she had put him off, saying she did not want to speak to any one—all she wanted was to be left alone.

Rafe was quite familiar with this mood of hers—a dark solitary mood that took possession of her every now and then. He knew that it was wisest to take her at her word and leave her to recover herself in solitude.

But Hugh—it was certainly strange not to have heard from him. Usually he remained for a few days only in the city, and it was entirely out of order for him not to spend a great part of that time with Rafe, on the rare occasions when he left his country estates.

Hugh owned great estates—vast acres of parkland and woods and meadows, a beautiful old manor-house, and all the other joys and encumbrances of a man of property. He took his duties seriously, and administered his estate in a thoroughly competent manner. Those who confounded his kindness with weakness or his easy-going ways with indulgence were speedily undeceived, and went away to learn their mistake in a colder, harder world than the miniature world of Redscarp, as the Bremner property was named.

Rafe's friendship with Hugh was begun in the War, and subsequent years had cemented the bond between them. Hugh had snatched Rafe from a hideous and lingering death out there on the battlefields of Flanders. Later in the campaign, Rafe had crippled himself—losing one leg and three inches of bone from the other—by stopping to disentangle Hugh from a mass of wire while the enemy's shells whined and burst all about them.

Even Erzebet had not altered this friendship. Rafe had loved her for years before Hugh dawned on his horizon, and it was he who had introduced Hugh to the girl. But his deep passion for Erzebet had not blinded him to the fact that it was she who had wooed his friend—it was Erzebet's strong will and magnetic personality which had tricked and caught Hugh into a proposal of marriage.

Rafe had pitied both of them, but especially the girl! He saw so clearly that she was bound to lose in the long run. The bubble she had tried to seize was bound to dissolve.

Love—especially the love of a man of Hugh's type—was not to be permanently held by the means she had employed. No! Her bubble was bound to burst, and, waiting day after day for some word of the two he loved, Rafe concluded the bubble *had* burst.

Something — Rafe cogitated — most likely another woman, had brought about the inevitable crisis. Hugh had broken loose from the silken enchantment of Erzebet's spell . . . he had come to his senses at last.

Having finally arrived at this conclusion, Rafe decided to act. He would go to see Erzebet in spite of her expressed desire.

She was so desperate, so passionate, so undisciplined and ungovernable in her moods and reactions. If Hugh had turned her love aside, she would be as savage and dangerous as some wounded wild creature of her own Hungarian forests, ready to strike and hurt all who came near.

Rafe was not afraid—except of hurting her still further. And there was the possibility that in this crisis she might need him, might turn to his long faithful love for her, as a little storm-driven boat might run into the nearest haven.

A SCARED little French maid admitted him to Erzebet's apartment.

"Madame has locked herself in her studio," she told him. "Since many hours Madame has remained there in silence—but a great silence! It is strange—I like it not—this silence!"

Rafe tried the door, shook and rattled the knob. No response. The cook, a stolid peasant woman, came to the rescue with tools and implements, and in a few minutes the door stood open.

Rafe strode inside. He saw Erzebet at once. She lay on her divan, her eyes closed, her head sunk deep into a silken cushion — its glowing purple a fitting frame for the proud, passionate face.

Hastily he limped across the luxurious room, took up one limp hand, his fingers sliding to the wrist. The pulse beat steadily, and through her parted lips the breath came warm and vital.

Rafe drew himself upright, looked round the room with quick alarm. His eye fell on the open book at her side, the sprigs of vervain, ash, and basil that were strewn about her couch. He noted the three carved black-ivory bowls standing on the floor at her feet . . . where strange horrible little objects floated on the surface of some nauseating liquid.

"Erzebet! Erzebet!" he groaned, his olive skin turning a sickly pallor. He turned abruptly to the two servants who stood gaping on the threshold.

"Go away!" he commanded sternly. "Close the door and go away at once! I know what to do, and need no help."

The two women obeyed simultaneously and promptly, afraid of the queer look of that studio, and the still figure of their mistress.

"Erzebet!" Rafe addressed the unconscious girl with deep reproach. "You swore that never, *never* again would you have recourse to this!"

His face became haggard as he saw how deep was her trance, and noted more signs of her infernal craft about the studio. He sank into a chair by the divan, and stared miserably at the wonderful quiet face before him.

"It's Hugh!" he murmured. "She's going to punish him! This was what I feared. My God! she'll destroy him . . . she'll destroy herself!"

He got up and began to limp to and fro, disgust, horror and pity alternately mirrored on his face. At last he came to a standstill before a great volume lying open on the floor at his feet—an old, old book bound in curiously tooled leather,

and fastened with ancient tarnished silver clasps. He gazed at the heavy black-letter printing as if hypnotized, looking long at the signs and symbols wrought in red and gold in the wide margins of the heavy parchment leaves.

"The Gate to Hell . . . she has flung it open once more!" he half whispered at last. "That cursed father of hers—to teach a child such evil!"

He turned aside, threw the dark liquid out of the window, burned the leaves strewn over her; then, opening every window wide, let the cool night air blow through the reeking room.

He came back to stare down at Erzebet again, and from her to the open book still lying on the floor.

"How to help — how to save them both?" He asked himself this over and over again. "She will kill Hugh—or worse! She will destroy herself body and soul! And what—what in God's name *can* I do?"

He stumbled wearily to a chair.

"I must wait here anyhow until she . . . until she comes back!"

For long he sat there thinking, revolving the wildest schemes, fighting to see a way out of the darkness into which Erzebet had plunged them all. At last he picked up the great sinister volume with reluctant hands.

"She learnt her devil's trade from this. Perhaps I can learn something, too! Perhaps there is the antidote as well as the poison here. If I can learn how she controls those dark hidden forces at her command; if I, too, could command them! All power can be controlled—tapped! If I could learn how to shut off that power of hers completely . . . sever the connection between her and — and — whatever it is she does control!"

He turned the yellowed crackling leaves.

"Ah! Swedenborg . . . dreams . . . sidereal bodies. Conjuration of the Four! Goëtic Circle of the Black Evocations! The extension of the Will into another body . . . served and organized by an Elemental Spirit! Control . . . visibility . . . limitations!"

His breath quickened.

"Limitations! That sounds like it . . . there are—there *must* be limitations!"

He became lost in studying the crabbed ancient print. Frowning and intent, he read on . . . hours passed . . . dawn plucked with pale fingers at the eastern horizon. But Rafe read on, his face drawn with fatigue, his hands and feet cold, his eyes red-rimmed and weary.

And as he labored, working in a mist of horror and feverish excitement, Erzebet slept on.

Day came; a window clashed to in a sudden flurry of wind and rain, and Rafe raised a grim, exhausted face at the crash.

Day was come, but Erzebet's body still lay motionless, its tenant still abroad—seeking vengeance—seeking payment for its hurt.

3

It was many hours previous to Rafe's first discovery of Erzebet in her death-like trance; it was, in fact, during the morning of that fatal day that Hugh Bremner went to Cynthia.

She lived near Redscarp on the edge of Hugh's estate—this girl who had taught him what love was, and how poor an imitation of the real thing was his feeling for Erzebet.

Hugh sought Cynthia on this particular day with the conviction that every barrier between them was removed. He had got the dreaded interview with Erzebet over at last. Now he could go to Cynthia with a free mind. She was as sharply contrasted with the Hungarian as a little fragrant hedge-rose contrasts with

a rare orchid from the depths of a tropical forest.

He called for her early in the morning, drove her out miles into the heart of the country, through lanes heavy with the scent of honeysuckle, gay with purple loose-strife, vetch, and creamy masses of meadowsweet. Bees and butterflies darted and hummed across the golden sunlit ways.

It was a perfect day—a day of unutterable and complete content. So Hugh thought as he drove on under the blue sky, deeper and deeper into the beauty of that heaven-sent day. Each time he glanced down at Cynthia's little golden head, in its sheath-like green helmet, his heart knew a still quiet joy that Erzebet's kisses had never awakened.

He forgot that payment must be made even for such kisses, reluctant though his had often been. Hugh had played and lost his first round in the game of love. Now the cards had been dealt again for him, and they were good — certainly a winning hand this time. But there was that first game! He had not yet paid his reckoning for that.

They lunched at an inn tucked away among tall beech trees and sturdy oaks. The innkeeper and his jolly stout wife had gossiped with them in the pleasant friendly way of the countryside; had pressed the home-brew on them and given Cynthia a great bunch of roses and mignonette from the old-fashioned garden, and had waved a last good-bye as Hugh started his car and chug-chugged away again through the flowery lanes.

During the heat of the afternoon they rested by a trickling silver stream, where Cynthia's golden head shone in the dusky gloom of the trees all about them.

"So you've been to see Erzebet Machik?" the girl asked, breaking a long, peaceful silence at last. "Do tell me all that happened, Hugh? I know you were worrying about it."

His account left Cynthia very thoughtful, although he touched very lightly on the sudden fury with which the violinist had concluded the interview.

"You know, Hugh dear——" Cynthia hesitated, her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the splashing cheerful little stream at her feet. "You know, I think you may have been mistaken. Perhaps she *did* love you. I've never spoken to her—never seen her except on a concert platform. But she looked like a flame—a rather dark fierce sort of flame—the kind of woman who would love—and hate—desperately. She would be a terrible enemy, Hugh! And if she did love you——"

Hugh took one small sun-browned hand in his.

"Funny wise little creature," he teased. "You think every woman looks at me through your eyes. Because I've managed to bluff you into caring, doesn't mean that other women share your delusions about me. Erzebet collects lovers as other women collect china, or autographs, or foreign luggage labels. I hurt her pride, not her heart. Her heart she puts into her music; she takes nothing seriously outside that one supreme gift of hers."

"You may be right," she replied doubtfully.

"But you don't think I am."

"No, I don't, Hugh!" The girl got to her feet suddenly, and stood looking down at him with big serious gray eyes. "I am not often bothered with premonitions, as you know, dear, but I feel strongly that this is not the end of Erzebet Machik as far as we are concerned."

"Why, Cynthia!" he protested. "You don't understand. Why on earth should a famous star concern herself any more with me and my affairs? I don't claim to be any more modest than the next man, but after all she *is* an exceptional woman

—she has a whole world of men at her feet! Also she's going off on a world tour very shortly."

Cynthia perched precariously on a large stone at the edge of the stream, hugging her knees—a small green elf of a girl.

Hugh began to feel a little uneasy. Cynthia might sit there looking like some Puck of the forest; her serious intent expression rather added to her appearance of child-like innocence; but Hugh knew well enough that the brain in that enchanting flower-like head was very far from child-like! It was unusually keen and penetrating, and her judgment was matured far beyond her years.

"Did Rafe ever talk to you about this—your affair with Erzebet?" she asked.

"Never once mentioned her name since—well, since Erzebet and I——"

"But before that?"

"Yes, he was always talking about her in the old days. But I never gathered that he counted himself in the reckoning as far as marrying her went."

"There was no question of rivalry, then?"

"Rivals? No," Hugh laughed. "Why, old Rafe would never be any man's rival! He's obsessed with the idea of presenting the world to Erzebet on a golden salver! That's the chief reason why I'm certain she never cared for me. If she *had* cared, Rafe would have had us married as quickly as butter slides off a hot plate! My ideas on the subject wouldn't have mattered in the least."

"Even if he knew you didn't care?"

"My little Puck! He couldn't conceive of a man that could resist Erzebet, I am sure. He'd take the man's feelings for granted, if he knew *she* cared."

"Well—of course you're only a man, darling." She gave him a sudden gay little smile. "Therefore you can only see one point of view at a time."

"You don't want me to squint, do you?" Hugh got up, stretching himself luxuriously, picking her up off the stone, and gave her a small shake.

"We've had enough oracles from you, young woman!"

He put her down suddenly, staring with half-open mouth, his brown tan fading to a jaundiced yellow.

"Hugh! Hugh—what is it? What do you see?"

The girl turned a frightened face over her shoulder. There was nothing there except the green trees with the sun filtering through their branches. But the man's eyes were fixed in an incredulous glassy stare at a point above her head. He moved backward with an involuntary gesture of disgust and fear.

"Hugh . . . my dear . . . what is it?"

Cynthia stood back herself to gaze distractedly above and around her. Nothing . . . nothing but the sun-flecked woodland!

The man's eyes followed her, turning as she turned, but never once did he meet her imploring eyes. He gazed, as if hypnotized, at that fixed point above her head.

As she approached he backed away in such horror and loathing, that at last she made no more attempt to touch, or console him with hand or voice. She stood like some dumb stricken thing watching his face.

Suddenly he shuddered violently, put a hand over his eyes, and said: "You were right! My God, you were right!"

"What . . . who?" stammered Cynthia, afraid to move or speak.

"It's her . . . she's here . . . she . . . how devilish!"

"Oh, what—*what* do you see?" Cynthia's whisper broke on a sob.

"Erzebet! Erzebet! She's standing there by you . . . she's laughing . . . laughing . . . laughing! There—right behind you—over your head!"

Cynthia drew back with a cry, shaken to the soul by his voice and desperate eyes. About her, little darting insects hummed and flashed, the stream gurgled and chattered on its way, the trees stirred dreamily in the wandering breezes. All was still and peaceful, a very paradise of gold and green.

"But Hugh—my darling! There is nothing—nothing here! You are ill!"

"No! No! Don't come near. She is coming with you . . . no . . . keep off!" He thrust out both hands to prevent her impetuous movement.

Helpless and perplexed, the girl caught hold of a projecting branch to steady herself. Her fear died in an overwhelming anxiety and pity for Hugh. He *was* ill. It must be that fever again—a painful legacy left from war days. He had told her he suffered occasionally from bouts of it. Poor Hugh, she had no idea it was as bad as this!

"What do you want me to do?" she asked gently, humoring him.

"Go home—go home!" he gasped, his eyes still shaded by his hand. "Take the car and go! I'll walk back to that inn—the man will lend me another car. Only go now, if you love me, Cynthia! I'll try to think out a way!"

She left him there, alone, a stricken solitary creature surrounded by all that bravery of flower and leaf! His face was toward the running water, his head sunk on his chest, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his sports coat. An image of despair, which blotted out every gleam of sun and happiness as far as the girl was concerned.

She drove off into a world grown suddenly old and gray.

4

FIVE—ten minutes elapsed after Cynthia's whispered sad: "Good-bye, Hugh, darling!"

Hugh raised his head; his white lips twitched as he looked up. In front of him, on the carpet of trodden leaves, it still faced him. He forced himself to look at the dreadful mocking thing. It was Erzebet, and yet—no!—no! It could not be the girl herself. Wild, erratic, selfish and passionate he knew her to be, but she was at least human. She was at least flesh and blood, not this grinning, devilish thing that was so like, and yet so vastly unlike, the Erzebet he knew.

He looked, spellbound. Here was Erzebet, feature by feature. Here was her raven hair, her superb body, her hands—slender, strong, and exquisitely fashioned to make the music she adored. On one finger gleamed the great emerald he had himself worn until she had seen and coveted it. Here was Erzebet in every last detail of outward appearance.

But behind the beautiful mask of a face *what* glared at him from those dark eyes? *What* had clothed itself in that well-known body, so like, and so unlike human flesh and blood?

What was the nature of that amorphous leering Thing that drifted among the trees, light as air, bound by no natural laws of sound or movement? It walked across the running water as though its silent feet trod a shining carpet. It floated through the solid trunks of trees as a bird moves through the air.

The man's eyes followed it in fascinated horror. It came to stand close to him at last, its red lips drawn back in mockery, its eyes looking closely into his . . . their cold awful malice was paralyzing. Hugh became conscious of a fear so unutterable that his very reason tottered.

What—*what* creature of the Pit stared at him from behind those cold unsmiling eyes? His senses reeled, his eyes grew dim, his heart thumped against his ribs in slow deep throbs that shook him through and through. Desperately he tried to get a grip on himself. He must fight whatever enemy this was that menaced him. He must not let it . . . not let it——

THE innkeeper and his hired man picked him up, unconscious, where he had fallen in that terrible stress of mind and body.

Cynthia watched from a distance, afraid of his seeing her in his present state, saw them lift Hugh into a car, and followed at a short distance until they reached his home.

She saw his limp body carried into the hall of his stately home, and waited there to tell the hastily summoned doctor what little she knew of his sudden illness. Then she went home to wait and fear and long for news.

HUGH woke to find himself in his own bed. A tall, shaded lamp revealed his faithful old valet sitting at some distance away, head sunk on his breast in profound slumber. His eyes wandered round the room in uneasy wonder. A cry rose to his lips.

What was that—what was that standing by his bedside, with red mouth laughing in silent convulsive mirth, with cold savage furious eyes which stared down into his soul?

God! He remembered now! The wood . . . that Thing like Erzebet . . . that Thing he had tried to fight! He must have lost the fight—the Thing must have conquered him—and what had it done to him?—what did it want?—how had he reached home? Thoughts whirled in his brain under the awful, steady gaze of the figure at his bedside.

Must he fight again? What could he do . . . what *could* he do to an enemy like this one? His lips opened to call and wake his valet; then he shut them again. He could not explain, could not tell any one of this thing he saw. It was his fight alone. No one in the world could help him, not even Cynthia—especially not Cynthia! He groaned as he remembered how close that hateful obscene Thing had been to the girl—and she so supremely unconscious of the evil at her side. No! —he would never see Cynthia again until he was free from this hideous companion.

Presently the creature moved round the bed, sat down on a chair at his side. Through its dark head, and supple body sheathed in glowing silk, Hugh could still see the shaded lamp burning, and beyond, the sleeping figure of the old valet.

The creature showed white teeth in an abandonment of mirth as Hugh's eyes mirrored his disgust and fear. It leaned forward, put one strong slender hand on the man's clenched fist. Hugh's whole body seemed to shrink and wither under the touch. Transparent, insubstantial as mist, that shadowy hand closed over his like a cold steel trap. He could no more have wrenched his fingers free, than a bale of wool could extricate itself from the iron jaws of a crane.

Sick, shivering with the unspeakable horror of it, Hugh closed his eyes. A cold dank breath fanned his face—the odor of the charnel-house! The Thing stooped over him . . . close . . . closer! The dreadful smiling lips were close to his, touched them . . . clung like a damp decaying lichen!

For the second time, Hugh fainted dead away.

When he woke from that long swoon, dawn was at hand. The old valet was awake, and moving softly about the room; he noticed his master's eyes were open, and held a glass to his lips. Potent, aro-

matic, the dose cleared Hugh's brain and brought a glow to his numbed, chill body. He remembered almost instantly on this awakening the horror which had plunged him into oblivion. His haunted glance darted swiftly about the room.

There—there, before the closely drawn window curtains, stood the tall woman's figure. Fresh, radiantly beautiful, smiling, devilish and implacable the Thing still waited. It caught Hugh's look and held it for an anguished second; then, with an incomparably graceful movement, it raised one slender hand to its smiling mouth — kissing its fingers in mocking salute!

Hugh turned to his servant.

"Draw back the curtains, Wilson," he ordered.

The old man went stiffly to obey, and Hugh noticed that he stood right beside the horrible leering Thing—put an arm through the creature's body, in order to pull the curtains into place. Hugh set his teeth. He was right: no one else could see it, no one would believe him! He must play out this game alone.

He got out of bed, pulled a dressing-gown about him, and walked with shaking limbs to the nearest chair.

"Bring coffee and rolls, Wilson! I'm better—I want some food!"

The old man hesitated.

"Yes, sir! The doctor did say, sir——" he began.

"I know." Hugh managed a queer one-sided smile for the devoted old servitor. "Keep him in bed, and give him a dose every three hours!"

The other's anxious face relaxed.

"Yes, sir. Those were his orders."

"Never mind about them. Hurry with the coffee, there's a good fellow!"

Wilson disappeared, and Hugh addressed himself to that other one. It was moving about the room. Its rich silks gleamed in the shadows, its hands fingered the articles on his tables, and chest, and bureau. It paused long before a photograph of Cynthia, then turned to look over its shoulder with a long gaze of cunning malice which brought Hugh to his feet.

All fear was burnt up in the scorching fury that possessed him when he saw that loathsome grinning devil leer at *that* picture.

He fairly leaped for the mocking woman-shape . . . his hands made for the long white throat . . . he was babbling, frantic, demented by rage!

The valet, entering at that moment with a laden breakfast tray, saw his master staggering about with fists raised and clenched in a curious gesture, as if he had something in his grasp, and his voice was shouting hoarsely:

"Not her . . . not her, you devil from hell!"

Wilson dropped the tray with a thump on the nearest chair, and made a stumbling dash across the room. At his touch and the sound of his quavering voice, Hugh turned a distorted face.

"It laughed at *her* . . . even at *her!* Ah-h-h-h! It's going to kiss me again! Don't let it do that . . . don't let——"

His voice ceased with a queer choked cry, and for the third time Hugh's senses failed him, and merciful oblivion blotted out life and its horror.

5

"I'M AFRAID he won't see you, Miss! His orders were very strict."

"But, Wilson, I simply must see him, if it is only for a minute," Cynthia pleaded. "How is he . . . does he still see——"

"His *hal*lucination seems to have left him—for the time, Miss. Leastways, he's stopped looking round as he did. But he's pretty bad, yes, pretty bad on the whole. The doctor—he's afraid of brain-fever, Miss."

The girl nodded, her face serious and intent.

"Listen to me, Wilson," she said, after a brief silence. "I know how much your master trusts you. Now I, too, am going to take you into my confidence. Do you happen to know this handwriting?" She displayed an envelope, with a few lines of very characteristic calligraphy. A black, squared writing with peculiarly long sweeps to certain letters. A bold, unmistakable hand.

"I remember that, yes, Miss. I've seen it often enough. That's Mr. Rafe Sterne's writing, that is."

"You're right. Now, did your master receive a letter from Mr. Sterne this morning. Did you notice one?"

"Yes, he did. He opened it first of all, and he never touched the rest of his mail —just read that one of Mr. Sterne's over and over again, Miss. He's up there now with that letter in front of him; it looked to me as if that letter was bad news—very bad news, Miss."

"Yes—yes, it was bad news for him. I know what was in that letter—it's because of it that I must see your master at once. It's a matter of life and death, Wilson . . . I *must* see him!"

Wilson nodded, convinced by her passionate earnestness. They were standing in the wide entrance hall; now the man turned toward the staircase. He led the way up in silence, their feet sinking into the mossy pile of the rich carpet.

"He's in the smoking-room, to the left there. It wouldn't be no use for me to announce you, Miss, if you'll excuse me. Better go right in and see him if you must."

The girl did not hesitate. Lightly, eagerly she went forward, opened the door softly and slipped inside the room. Her eyes went straight to Hugh. There he sat, at his desk, his big frame stooped over it, his head resting on his two hands. An open letter lay before him. Gently Cynthia closed the door and went forward.

"Hugh!"

At the clear gentle voice, the man raised his head abruptly.

At sight of his ravaged face, his haunted despairing eyes, Cynthia's heart turned cold. This could not be Hugh! Impossible! This wreck of a man—with his lined gray face, bowed shoulders, dull eyes, and trembling hands—this could not be her big sun-tanned stalwart young lover!

Then, an overwhelming desire to help and comfort him blotted out all else. She ran to him, took his head to her breast.

"Hugh—my dear, my dear!"

He did not shrink from her. As she sat down on an arm of his chair, he relaxed against her shoulder, while she stroked his hair and whispered her love and pity. At last he took her two hands in his, and looked long into her eyes.

"You ought not to have come." Even his voice was the tired voice of an old man. "I was going to write—to explain, if possible. Cynthia, I must go away from here. I . . . you . . . we must never meet again!"

"No—ah, never that, Hugh!" she cried.

"This madness that has come to me," he went on without heeding her. "It will get worse—I might hurt people—I might injure you, my little one! My mind is made up. I shall go at once . . . somewhere . . . some place where no one who cares can see me turn into a madman . . . into a wild raving beast!"

Her eyes were wide with horror and grief.

"You could never be that! Never! And I am not afraid, my dear. Whatever happens, whatever you are, I am going to stay with you. And besides——"

The man was not listening to her. He was looking at her face, at her trembling

lips and tender eyes. This was the last, the very last time he would look on this face, so unutterably dear to him! Her love, her tender shining beauty . . . the memory of it would be a light in the great darkness to which he was going.

"Hugh, darling! You are not listening to me. There *is* a chance for you—for both of us. He says so here!"

She took up the open letter from his desk and began to read it.

"This is going to be hard to write" [the letter began abruptly]. "I'm betraying Erzebet in sending it at all, and you're the only one in the world worth doing that for. The bond between us is too deep, I find, to allow me to watch you driven to madness without a warning. I'm bound to tell you what's happening to you. I'm bound to show you the only possible way out, as far as I can see it.

"Don't judge Erzebet when you learn the truth. You never understood her, never loved her. I love her. I understand what's driven her to use this infernal power of hers.

"Erzebet's father was as near to being a devil as a man could be; in fact, I doubt whether he was altogether human in the end. A deadly poisonous creature. Outcast from every class—every form of society—he turned to Black Magic at last. He wanted power—riches—revenge on a world which had cast him forth on its dunghills to rot.

"He sank to incredible depths of depravity. His associates were raked from the gutters of European cities. Constantinople—Bucharest—Vienna—Marseilles—Naples. The dehumanized, abnormal, decadent scum of all nations joined him. They formed a sort of sect, most foul and menacing it was. It reached out leprous fingers to every grade of society, once Machik had money enough to achieve his purpose. That purpose was to destroy—utterly to ruin those who had cast him out. His evil mind loathed every and any form of social order, of law and decency. His aim was to undermine and drag down to his own hell those who sat in the sun.

"And he taught Erzebet! My God! can you conceive anything more hellish than that? He taught his devil's trade to her while she was still a child. She grew up familiar with evil that would make a man's brain reel.

"Only her great gift of music saved her. Her genius shut her off in a world of her own. But she had learned the secrets—she was an initiate of that infernal sect. In her brain the seed had been fatally planted. She knew and could never forget the mysteries—the formulæ—the words of power that would enable her to control vast, terrific forces.

"She had the Key. If she chose, she could unlock the door to blind hateful evil from beyond . . . from the outer darkness. Within limitations she could command the living . . . and the dead!

"She has done it! She has unlocked the door! You are being haunted by a devilish thing she has called from hell!

"You are in fearful danger—and so is she! One mistake, one slip on her part and she would lose control of this thing—this Elemental, and be plucked down to hell by its fury.

"She puts herself into a trance, and lends her ego, her essential self, as a garment for the evil made visible by this means. This ego is called a sidereal body, visible, yet having neither weight nor substance.

"You are being forced to look upon the foulest thing a man may see—and live! But you can't live long with such a companion at your side. You'll die a raving maniac unless you escape soon.

"There is a way of escape.

"Marry Cynthia at once! I have seen her, told her all that I have written here. You will object and try to shut her out—refuse to let her share the danger. Fortunately for you, Cynthia is over age and absolutely determined, and we have made very complete plans between us.

"Sir Donald Fremling is coming to you today. You'll remember him, the most brilliant psychical research man of the day. He'll brace you mentally and physically to go through with this. He's bringing a clergyman with him, a man who will be neither shocked nor surprized at anything you may do or say during the wedding-ceremony.

"All you have to do now is to go through with this marriage as secretly and speedily as possible.

"There are certain definitely fixed limits to the power of these Elemental Spirits—I have been desperately trying to learn these limits.

"A marriage—a true marriage between people capable of the highest kind of love is a tremendous obstacle. The mystic union forms an enormously strong barrier against an assault such as you are enduring.

"Your resistance and will coupled with Cynthia's would make it almost impossible for the Thing which haunts you now to make itself visible . . . to use the sidereal body it has borrowed from Erzebet any longer.

"Marry Cynthia at once.

"It is up to you to do what I ask—you owe it to me, Hugh, old man!

"Don't forget that I have betrayed Erzebet to warn you!

"Yours,

"RAFE."

Cynthia glanced through the letter and put it down again on the desk.

"Yes, he told me all that."

She bent to kiss him, stroking his hair, and giving him gentle motherly pats which made Hugh catch her to him with a sob.

"Now it will be all right, darling," she assured him. "Everything is arranged. I am going to marry you in a few hours whatever you say! Rafe will be here unless——"

"Unless Erzebet interferes!"

"Yes. He will try to stay with her until this evening. Rafe warned me that it was probable that she would be made aware of our plan by means of her—of her——"

She stumbled for the best word to use. Hugh's hand tightened on hers, and the sentence was left unfinished.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. A man servant entered solemnly, bearing a telegram on a silver salver.

Hugh opened and read it—let it flutter through his nerveless fingers to the floor. Hastily Cynthia picked it up, reading the message with horrified eyes. It ran:

"Erzebet knows. Disappeared early this morning. Am trying to trace her. Be ready for crisis. Great danger. Rafe."

Hugh rose and looked at Cynthia.

"You must go at once! This finishes it. Go, go before she—before it comes to me again! Go—quickly—quickly!"

She struggled, pleaded, resisted in vain. He was determined, and his love and despair gave him a sudden access of strength. In another minute she was outside his locked door, beating her small hands against the solid oak-panels in vain.

And inside that locked door Hugh waited alone.

6

AT FIRST he sat down at his desk again, every nerve strained, every sense alert, his glance darting about the room at each slightest sound. The long minutes passed. No dreaded gleam of silken dress, no dark beautiful head with smiling mouth and cold menacing eyes appeared. Half an hour. An hour passed.

"Hugh! Are you all right, dear?"

"Yes, dear."

At intervals Cynthia's voice came to him, muffled and pleading, and he answered. That was all, but as the hour spent itself his answers became stronger, more reassuring. He began to see a gleam of hope. There was just a chance that Rafe had been able to find Erzebet. Perhaps he had been in time to hinder her carrying out further schemes. If Rafe could hold her for that one day only! If marriage with Cynthia would not endanger her—if it freed him from this cursed Thing!

His heart grew lighter with every passing minute. It was past noon now. A few more hours was all he needed. He looked out of the window at the sweep of woodland and meadow, the distant blue hills against a cloudless sky. He heard the far-off clank-clank of a lawn-mower, the cawing of rooks in the great elm trees. All the life and sound and color of a summer noontide brought a feeling of peace and security to Hugh.

He sat down on the broad-cushioned window-seat, and lighted a cigarette with hands steadier than they had been for hours past. The smoke curled up blue and fragrant before his face. Tranquillized, with lids drooping over his weary eyes, Hugh smoked on. Cloud after cloud of smoke rose—hung—and settled in ever denser wreaths.

At last he turned to put down the stub of his cigarette. He became aware of the extraordinary amount of smoke that hung and curled beside him . . . swirling . . . moving constantly in a long straight spiral, weaving endlessly from the ground upward.

Fire! He must have dropped a lighted match on the old dry timber floor. He seized a big bowlful of flowers, and impulsively dashed down the water—flowers and all.

But from the pool of water, and the scattered heap of blossoms, the smoke rose steadily—denser than before.

Hugh bent down, puzzled, to examine more closely the spot on the floor from

which the smoke was rising. There was nothing. He could not find even a charred match among the wet flowers and leaves. He leaned back in his chair, his eyes on the moving spiral.

Then he knew!

Every nerve in his paralyzed body, every heavy beat of his heart told him his hour was come!

Fascinated he watched the swirling, eddying smoke. Desperately he strove to stave off the cold fear that robbed him of all thought and reason. He recalled Kipling's tale of the monkey-tribe caught by their enemy, Kaa, the monstrous snake. A flashing mental picture of those helpless animals rose in his mind. The foolish chattering creatures—hypnotized by Kaa's spell—walking obedient down the very throat of the great serpent, as it weaved its sinuous body in its dance of death! Even so was he going to his fearful end!

He heard Cynthia's voice and tried to answer her. His croaking whisper did not carry, and she called again and again.

With a hideous effort he pushed open the window . . . he was choking . . . gasping for air.

The smoke steadied and solidified. Two shadowy hands seemed to fold the gray vapor like a cloak about an unseen body. Color gleamed on cheek and hair and the rich folds of a robe.

It was there . . . complete now! Beautiful as one of the *Dream of Fair Women!* Menacing as a creature from Dante's deepest Hell!

Hugh leaned against the window-frame; the air was warm and sweet against his cold cheek.

The Thing was close beside him now; it leaned against him familiarly, took his hand, stroked it with Erzebet's soft hypnotic touch.

Hugh shuddered, an ice-cold chill in his veins. In another minute he knew he would lose control. A fearful nausea made his brain reel. He was slipping . . . slipping away to some dark void . . . slipping backward faster and faster . . . with those cold malevolent eyes boring into his very soul!

He leaned farther and farther back from the face which bent to his. He thrust his head and shoulders backward through the open window behind.

Back . . . back he leaned. A stab of pain, as the sharp ledge caught his spine, gave him a moment of sanity. If he fell from the window to the stone-flagged terrace beneath, he would break his neck! Was that what Erzebet was trying to do—force him to commit suicide?

He knew suddenly, in that clear lightning-flash of reason, that *he must not die like that!*

He raised his hands and pushed—struck blindly at the evil smiling mouth—beat off the clinging hands.

He was sick to the soul. The Thing was ice-cold and slimy. It seemed to dissolve . . . disintegrate under his blows. It spread over his hands and arms . . . his face . . . every part of him. Long shreds of the slime slithered and crawled over him . . . round his neck . . . strangling the breath out of his body.

Hugh fought wildly, clutching the moving tentacles, trying to strip them from his throat . . . his chin . . . his mouth!

God! the stench of the loathsome Thing! He could not breathe—could not see even the terrible fixed stare of the unwinking eyes any more.

He raised his voice in a last yell—a cry of rage and terror that was heard halfway down the long corridor outside; and the group hurrying from the stairway dashed forward with one consent.

The locked door detained the leader of the party only for a moment. He was an old man with an extraordinarily beautiful and powerful face. He bent, inserted a

small instrument into the keyhole, and flung open the door.

"Stay here, if you value his life!" commanded Sir Donald Fremling, turning to those at his heels.

The valet, Cynthia, and a young clergyman stood on the threshold—no one ever dreamed of disobeying Sir Donald!

They could see Hugh over by the window. His face was distorted, ashen-white, and his eyes were mad and staring as he clawed at his throat and mouth.

7

IT WAS too late when Rafe finally discovered Erzebet.

He had extorted the secret of her hiding-place only after terrible scenes with the Hungarian peasant woman who was Erzebet's cook and ally. It was afternoon before he found the old deserted house on the outskirts of the city, where Erzebet had fled to carry out her revenge without interruption.

It was too late. She was already in a deep trance when Rafe forced his way into the house.

He was beside himself with anxiety—he knew too little, and too much! Too little to be sure he could safely recall Erzebet! Too much not to realize that every moment of her trance was inimical to Hugh! The latter was fighting for life and sanity—a man against a devil—a human being against a thing altogether inhuman and evil!

He was torn by fear and indecision. He had the merest smattering of knowledge concerning this loathsome business of Black Magic. True, he *did* know how to wake Erzebet from her coma—the formula was written plainly in that hateful book. But his superficial knowledge embraced the fact that hideous danger attended both the summoning and dismissal of an Elemental.

To lend, as Erzebet was doing, the living vital essence of her personality to an Elemental Spirit, entailed the most horrible risks.

Rafe was in an agony of indecision.

To leave Hugh to face a fight where the end was inevitable, defeat absolutely certain! To let Hugh be dragged down to hell without making any effort to save him! To have rescued him from the slaughter out in Flanders, only to leave him now to face a ten times more hideous death!

A dozen times he put out his hand for that which would bring Erzebet back. A dozen times he halted.

Would it be Erzebet herself that returned? Was it safe to call her back against her will? Suppose her spirit never won back to her body! Suppose that blind malevolent force she controlled slipped its leash and took control of her! It would prevent her return, steal this exquisite shell she had left empty.

Dared he interfere?

Hugh or Erzebet! Erzebet or Hugh! These two he loved seesawed everlastingly on the scales. What to do . . . in the name of all the fiends, *what* should he decide to do?

It seemed he must damn one of them. Which . . . which one? Erzebet or Hugh . . . Hugh or Erzebet?

He groaned—looked at his watch—looked at Erzebet—put his hand to his pocket, and withdrew it empty.

What was Hugh doing? Was he counting on Rafe to help?—counting on him with the trust and confidence that lay so deep between the two men?

There *was* a chance that he might safely bring Erzebet back. There was no chance for Hugh if he were left unaided.

Old war days flashed back to Rafe's mind. The blood and tumult and carnage of that night they had gone over the top . . . the crucifying agony of those mo-

ments he hung on the wire entanglement . . . the blessed, blessed relief of Hugh's voice, the sense of safety as Hugh's strong arms lifted him free and bore him to shelter. There were other—many other unforgettable moments.

He saw Hugh fighting single-handed, deserted, forsaken by the one man in the world who could help him. Hugh, mad, tortured, devil-ridden . . . and alone!

No! No! He *must* save him!

He drew a tiny vial of rare oil from his pocket, took out the stopper, and with trembling fingers touched Erzebet's mouth and nostrils.

The room was filled with the pungent aromatic odor of the priceless unguent.

He traced the Star of Solomon on the dusty floor, and, standing on it, he sprinkled a handful of earth about his feet, with a few red embers from the charcoal brazier by Erzebet's couch; and lastly he poured out consecrated water from a flask he had brought.

Then he recited the formula in a hoarse but steady voice:

"By earth, by water, by fire, by air I command thee, thou Blind Evil! By Adonai Eloim, by the demons of the heaven of Gad! Vaa Eloim! Vaa Chavajoth! Chavajoth! Chavajoth! I command thee by the Key of Solomon, and the great name Aberer Chavajoth! Vaa Eloim! Vaa Chavajoth! Chavajoth! Chavajoth! Vaa! Vaa! Vaa! Vaa!"

He waited, trembling with suspense. The hair rose on his damp forehead. Erzebet's closed eyelids fluttered . . . she stirred . . . sighed. Then the eyes opened widely—stared directly at Rafe!

He had lost! Instantly he knew he had lost! It was not Erzebet that stared from under the black brows of that marvelous face.

He shuddered. Erzebet's loveliness seized and possessed by this obscene monster from the Pit! And it was he who had given her beautiful body to this devil!

Ah! . . . never . . . never! It was unendurable!

Crazed with horror, remorse, and fury Rafe drew his revolver, fired again and again at the cold deadly eyes fixed on his. The glorious woman's body crumpled and fell without a sound. Rafe looked at it; he bent and smoothed the heavy hair.

"I will follow you, Erzebet!" he whispered. "I will follow you to hell!"

He put the smoking weapon to his head, and drew the trigger.

8

EVEN as Sir Donald reached his side, Hugh suddenly dropped his arms. The glare of madness left his eyes, and he stood looking around in a bewildered incredulous fashion.

He reeled weakly against Sir Donald as the latter steadied him to a chair.

"It's gone . . . gone . . . gone!" he kept saying in a low shaken voice.

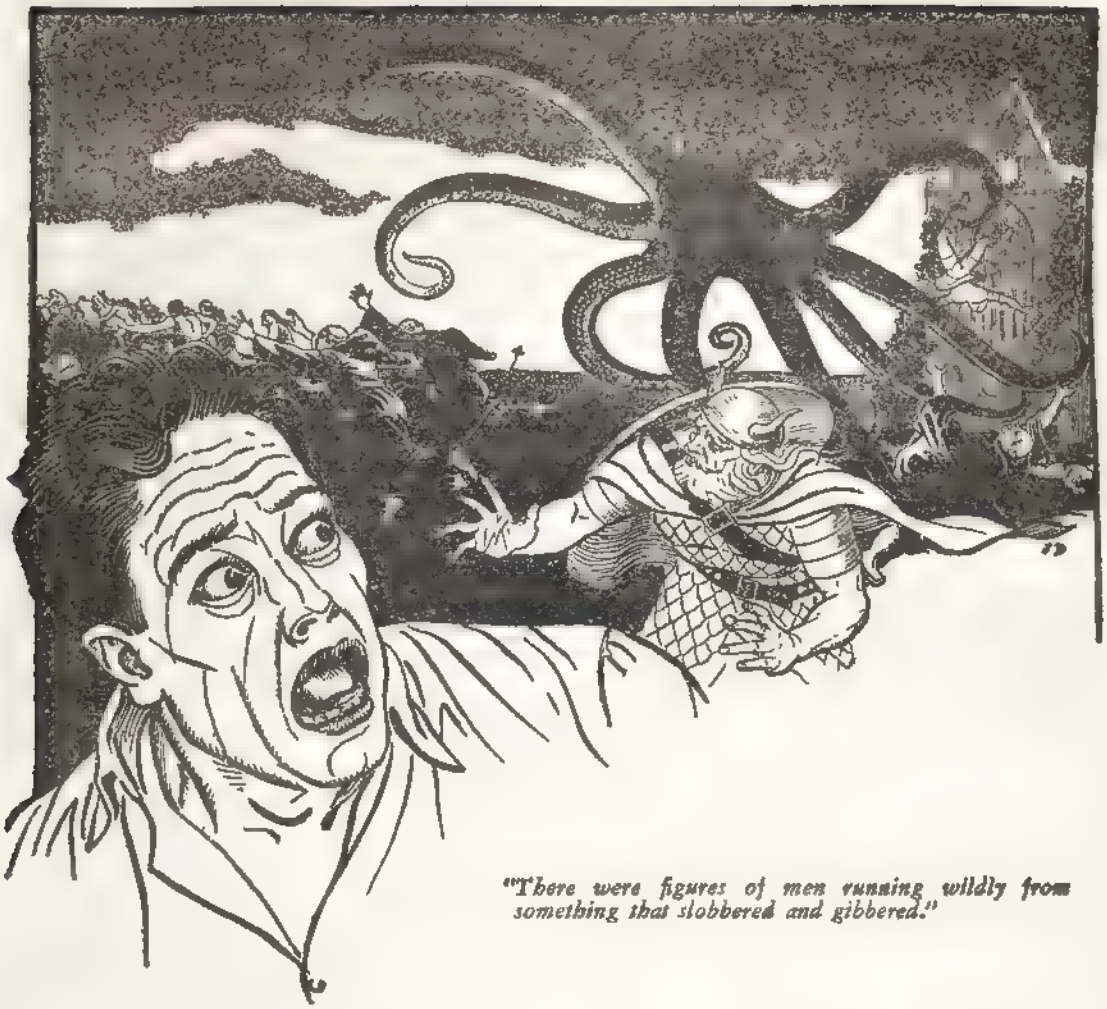
With deft hands the famous old servant administered an injection to the exhausted man; and almost immediately Hugh sank back into deep sleep, his face calm and untroubled, his whole frame peacefully relaxed.

* * * * * * *

Hugh Bremner is a happy man, happier than most. But the loss of Rafe, the price that his friend paid to set him free, is a thing that weighs heavy on his soul.

Not even Cynthia knows of the longing and bitter grief that drives him out to long lonely vigils under winter skies and summer moons.

That is a burden he shares with no one.



"There were figures of men running wildly from something that slobbered and gibbered."

Those Who Seek

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

The tale of a ghastly encounter with the elementals that haunted a ruined British abbey dating from Druidic times

MR. JASON PHILLIPS had no intention of going to the abbey, but when young Arnsley discovered that he was an artist, he simply had to go—there was no getting out of it. He had protested mildly at first; he had still to finish the painting of the castle, and he had promised himself a few spare moments in which to ramble around the estate of Lord Leveredge, Arnsley's father. But his objections were overruled by a wave of the hand, and consequently Mr. Phillips found himself on this October morning seated before his easel, staring miserably at the ruins of the abbey that had so caught young Arnsley's fancy.

It was very old, and quite like many other abbeys that Mr. Phillips had had the pleasure of seeing. However, Mr. Phillips noticed at once that the building was fairly well preserved for its age—

which, Arnsley said, dated back into the Roman invasion period, some said long before. The second and third floors of the building were almost gone; only a few supports projected into the air here and there. But the first floor, hidden for the most part by a dense growth of vines and bushes, was remarkably well preserved. Deep-set windows could be seen through the bushes, and over toward the cloister walk was a huge door which so engaged the artist's fancy that he decided to paint the abbey so as to feature the cloister walk and the door.

Mr. Phillips started his charcoal drawing. He made a few tentative strokes and erased them. After a moment of study, he repeated the process. There was something about the view of the cloister walk that escaped Mr. Phillips. He leaned away from the canvas and regarded the abbey in silent irritation. He tried the charcoal drawing again, with more precision this time. After a short time he put down his charcoal. He did not seem to be able to sketch the abbey as he saw it—there was a feeling as of someone guiding the charcoal. Mr. Phillips felt vaguely and unreasonably ill at ease.

It was perhaps the gruesome history of the abbey with which Arnsley had regaled him on the way up, added to his own previous knowledge. Of the actual building of the abbey, little seemed to be known. There was one date, the earliest, at 477 A. D., which Lord Leveredge had given out as the date the abbey was taken from the Celts by the Saxons. It was Lord Leveredge's idea that the Celts had erected the abbey first as a temple of Druidic worship, and recent discoveries about the grounds had unearthed nothing to oppose that theory. Indeed, several of the leading authorities stood in agreement with Lord Leveredge, and in a subsequent history of the place, this point was emphasized beyond all proportions. There was then a gap of three hundred years in the abbey's history. In 777 A. D. the abbey appeared in the contemporary histories once more. There was a curious story of the strange disappearance of a party of Danes who besieged the place, at this time still a temple. Mr. Phillips recalled that he had read of old-time bards who sang about this legend. This was perhaps the first of the incidents that gave the abbey a sinister reputation. Another occurred in 1537, during the time of Henry VIII, when the temple, then an abbey, was raided by a band of His Majesty's Reformation mercenaries. The abbey was at the time unoccupied, but strange unaccountable rumors had reached from generation to generation hinting at the awful things that happened there at the time of the raid. Arnsley recalled newspaper accounts of the "dark people" of the abbey, the ghosts of long-dead monks who marched forever along the cloister walk, telling their beads and reading their breviaries. The abbey had, in consequence, got a reputation of being haunted.

There was, too, a story not so legendary, that had happened only four years before. A fisherman had wandered into the abbey to sleep; it was common for these fisher folk to sleep in secluded places along the near-by coast where they plied their trade. The following morning this man was found wandering in a dazed condition on the sea coast. At first he could say nothing, and later, when some semblance of speech had been restored, he mumbled incoherently about songs and prayers, and there had been something of green eyes watching him. Two days after he had partly recovered, he disappeared. When a searching-party had been sent out, he was found dead and horribly mangled in the abbey. Of the means by

which he came by his death, nothing was ever discovered. There were curious marks on the man's body, deep claw-like tears in the flesh, and a ghastly whiteness led to the examination which showed that there was no drop of blood in the body—the man had either bled so profusely, or had been drained.

But this rumination was taking time, and Mr. Phillips, suddenly coming back to reality, reached quickly for his charcoal and again began his sketch, which seemed to go somewhat more easily this time.

MR. PHILLIPS had just completed his charcoal drawing when Arnsley appeared from inside the abbey and called to the artist to come in for a moment. With an annoyed smile, Mr. Phillips arose, and made his way slowly through the bushes to the spot where Arnsley stood.

"Well," he began as he came on, "what is it?" There was a petulant note of vexation in his voice which quite escaped Arnsley.

"I came across an inscription, old man, and I wonder if you could read it. It's Latin, I think, but so curiously wrought and so old, that I'm not sure if I'm reading it rightly—though I seem to be able to make out the lettering."

"Oh!" said Mr. Phillips, somewhat nettled.

"Just follow me," said Arnsley. He turned and entered the abbey and progressed swiftly along the corridor parallel to the cloister walk. "It's along in the corridor here," his voice came over his shoulder to Mr. Phillips, and he half turned to regard the artist in the subdued light of the corridor walk.

"Go on," said Mr. Phillips quickly, thinking of the charcoal drawing he was about to paint. "Go on."

"Seems to be on some sort of slab, I should say," continued Arnsley, as if he had not heard. "And it's almost obliterated—you'd expect that, wouldn't you?" Arnsley stopped suddenly. "Here we are."

Arnsley had come up before a rectangular slab of stone, set, as closely as the artist could determine, directly in the center of the corridor. Mr. Phillips bent to peer at the inscription that Arnsley indicated with his cane.

"What is it?" asked Arnsley after a moment.

"It's Latin, of course—just as you thought."

"Well, that seems to indicate that this place has Roman beginnings after all, eh?"

Mr. Phillips grunted irritably; he remembered that despite the authorities, Arnsley had held to his belief regarding the abbey as a product of the Roman invasion. "If this building was founded by the Romans of the first invasion, that inscription was put on a considerable time after. As nearly as I can make it out it reads QUI. PETIVERENT. INVENIENT., and that, literally translated, is a quotation from the Christian Bible—'Those Who Seek Shall Find.' Where did you get the idea that this place is Roman, Arnsley?"

"Oh! I strike upon that as the best bet," said Arnsley, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm told, though, that there's a priest over in Wallington who's got an old paper on the abbey, and he seems to think much as I do. I went over once to see his paper, but the old fellow wasn't at home, and his housekeeper was pretty chary about letting strangers mess about the priest's papers. The name's Richards, Father Richards; I've an idea you could get quite a bit of material from him if you wanted it. He's an authority on old abbeys and cathedrals."

Mr. Phillips raised his eyebrows.

"Surely your father must have something on the abbey?"

Arnsley shook his head. "Though he's custodian of the abbey for the government, he hasn't anything in his library pertaining to this place. Nor, curiously enough, has he ever cared to discuss the abbey with me. Off and on, he's given me a few vague facts, but most of what I know I've picked up from hearing conversations with archeologists who visit him. He clings pretty strongly to the Druidic beginning of the place, but when I said something to him about it one day, he dismissed the subject pretty sharply. Also, he seems to believe that there's something pretty much wrong about this place. I daresay that grows out of an experience he had here himself.

"He was up around this region hunting one day. Coming by here after dark, he swears he heard some one chanting here, and saw in a yellowish-gray half-light a procession of black cowled figures. He recalled that there were stories of the ghostly monks who haunted this place. None of us pays any attention to the story; his flask was perfectly empty when he reached home—and he can't usually carry that much in him."

Mr. Phillips laughed cautiously. Arnsley looked down at the slab. "Do you suppose it means anything?" he asked. "Perhaps it refers to some definite thing?"

"Rot, Arnsley. It's quite probable that the monks had that inscription put there. You'll find others, I daresay, if you look."

Arnsley looked at Mr. Phillips with a curious smile on his face. "It's odd that you should think of that at once. I thought so, too, and I took the trouble to look around before I called you. There aren't any other inscriptions."

"Very likely," returned Mr. Phillips imperturbably. "You see that this inscription is almost obliterated. Perhaps those others were not so fortunate."

"Perhaps," conceded Arnsley reluctantly, still keeping his gaze on the slab.

MR. PHILLIPS shrugged his shoulders and stamped out of the building to where his easel stood. Arnsley sank to his knees and began to examine the slab in the most minute detail. Contrary to Mr. Phillips, he did not believe that the inscription had been put there merely as a matter of devotion, so that the monks who walked this path hour after hour in years long gone by, heads cast down, lips moving in silent prayer, should see as they passed, this eternal word, and seeing, hope and seek to penetrate the veil. But nothing came of the scrutiny Arnsley gave the slab.

He rose at last, and, filled with a sudden hope, cast his eye about for a lost stone, or an old worn bracket. He had suddenly conceived the idea that this slab might hide some secret passage, long forgotten—probably even now impassable. A stone about three times the size of his clenched fist, almost hidden in the semi-darkness of the corridor, rewarded his search. Without hesitation, he seized it and began to pound upon the slab. After some moments he stopped; the effort seemed quite futile. He thought he detected a hollow sound from behind the slab, but he could not be sure; the difference that had caught his attention was at all events very slight. Then, too, he argued, the stone must be very thick—so thick that the pounding of this small instrument would not establish much. He stood up and dropped the stone, throwing it over toward the corridor wall.

Through a cloister window he caught sight of Mr. Phillips industriously daubing his canvas. He began to wish that they had not planned to stay here during

the night, so as to give the artist ample time to put the finishing touches to his picture the following day. If only Mr. Phillips had protested against carrying the blanket rolls! Arnsley could not explain his attitude; it was he, in the first place, who had suggested staying the night. It was perhaps the impending heaviness in the atmosphere that depressed Arnsley—so, at least, he concluded, after looking at the ominous black clouds low on the horizon. With an impatient sigh, he went out and got the blanket rolls and the little kit of tools they had brought, and took them into the abbey. He deposited them in the corner of one of the most sheltered rooms; then he came out toward Mr. Phillips, who had painted in his background, and was starting now on the cloister walk, which he could not do completely because the background might mix with the color of it at the edges.

It was late afternoon before Mr. Phillips put aside the painting. Then Arnsley and he had a light lunch, after which they spent the remaining hour of daylight wandering about the abbey and the woodland surrounding it. They had decided to retire early, so that they could leave the abbey before noon of the following day; consequently there was still a faint red line on the western horizon when they disrobed and rolled themselves into their blankets.

Although Arnsley slept immediately, Mr. Phillips tossed restlessly about for almost an hour. He could not rid himself of an uneasy feeling of impending disaster, and fear crept upon him from the darkness of the starless night. He sank at last into a state of dream-haunted slumber. He dreamed of vast expanses of blackness, where life crept about shrouded forever in the darkness of the pit. He saw immense black landscapes, where great gaunt figures of ancient Saxons, whose hard, cruel faces gleamed beneath their hoods, were arrayed like giant colossi. From the blackness a shape took form; there was a great gray stone building, crude as only the hands of far past ancestors could make it. And there were rows upon rows of cowled figures marching in triumphant procession about the stone circle, and away into the blackness of the sky. There was a huge stone pillar, from the flat top of which great streams of red ran into black maws open to receive it. There was a sudden flash of white, and Mr. Phillips saw in his dream a great green thing, faint against the sky, that flailed the air with long red tentacles, suckers dripping blood, and spattering it over the kneeling figures of supplicating worshipers. There was a haze again, that dropped like a velvet curtain, and again came the black ones, moving in and out among the worshipers, here and there signing to one to follow. Then this, too, was gone; covered with a great whiteness, like an impenetrable fog that swirled impotently about.

There was a familiar landscape now, and there were figures of men running wildly from something that slobbered and gibbered as it came after them, catching them one after the other with its swinging tentacles. In his dream Mr. Phillips saw suddenly the whiteness of fear-stricken faces. There were great towering hulks of men who cringed in abject fear. From the far north these Danes had come to conquer, and a sudden, awful death had come forth to meet them. There were others, too, smaller, frailer men, arrayed in the colors of the Tudors, who gibbered and frothed, thrown flat upon the ground. Some, maddened, beat their heads upon the rocks on the countryside, while ever there loomed that great green-black thing that flailed these helpless men with reddened

tentacles. Then there came a single face, a countenance so horrible in its fear that it caused Mr. Phillips to move uneasily in his sleep. The face vanished suddenly, and there was a man running, stumbling over the fields, fleeing aimlessly, and coming at last upon the place from which he had started—the ghoul-haunted ruins of the abbey! Again, flight, and black-robed priests who sat and waited, watching for the return of him who fled away into the night. There was an unholy light about the faces of the watchers.

Gradually, now, other things took shape. In his dream Mr. Phillips suddenly recognized the cloister walk of the abbey, and he saw in flaming letters the inscription on the slab—forming out of nothingness, one by one, QUI. PETIVERENT. INVENIENT. There was an endless dancing motion of the letters, and a brightness of flames, and a timelessness of meaning that awed the haunted mind of the sleeping artist. The letters stood alone in whiteness, but there were suddenly great clouds of swirling mist, and a blackness of figures impinged again upon Mr. Phillips' dream vision. From the darkness below he saw a long greenish-red thing licking out into the mist, where now formed the fear-drawn faces of men—Saxons, Danes, and there were the round faces of monks, grotesque in fear. There was a great redness, as of blood, and a chanting, a mumbling indescribable came up from below. There was a knowledge in his dream that enabled Mr. Phillips to know this ancient chant, this ceremonial prayer which was wafted to him. There now arose a ghastly ululation, and out of the cloister windows floated a loathsome, putrid blue-gray light. Out of the earth came eery mad chanting that crept away into the night. The mist that hovered above resolved itself into a long hand that swayed to and fro in the air above the slab and at last descended gracefully toward the low windows of the cloister. Down, down, it came, and at last it touched with sudden pressure upon the second of the three low sills just opposite the slab. Immediately the slab was flung upward, like the rebound of a trap-door. Then, from nowhere, came the black ones again, descending into the blackness beneath the opened walk. There were dozens of them, and hundreds—it seemed as if the procession would never end.

MR. PHILLIPS had no knowledge of that time of the night he was disturbed; he only knew that it was a sudden sharp cry that brought him out of his sleep. He sat up and looked over at his companion's bed. Arnsley was not there. He jumped up and began to search around in the half-light for his trousers. He had just got hold of them when the cry was repeated. It sounded very much like a cry for help, and it arose from near by, from within the abbey itself, on the ground floor.

Mr. Phillips hastily clothed himself, took hold of the hammer in the small tool kit they had brought along—the only weapon that came to hand—and crept warily out into the corridor, for it was from there that the cry seemed to come. He stood for a moment listening. From along the corridor came a succession of faint sounds, as of someone walking slowly into the distance—some heavy thing, someone carrying a bulky object, or a mass of creatures moving in rhythmic unison.

Tightening his grip on the hammer, Mr. Phillips went resolutely forward. As he advanced, he saw in the moonlight filtering through the slits of windows that the inscribed slab had been moved; it lay to one side of the black gap in the

walk. Mr. Phillips paused. Could Arnsley have dreamed as he had? He shot a quick glance toward the window-sills; the second was depressed—and Arnsley could not have known except as the artist had dreamed! Mr. Phillips was seized with a sudden, horrible dread; for a moment he stood as if grown to the spot. He was afraid to move; something seemed to warn him not to go farther. He felt a sudden, unaccountable urge to turn and flee, but he thought again of Arnsley and of the cries he had heard in the stillness. In the night his frightened mind conjured up before him the vision of the fisherman he had heard about.

He went tentatively forward, his hand tightly closed about the handle of the small hammer. He crept closer and closer to the opening. He was still horribly afraid, but he was possessed of an awful curiosity, stimulated by his fear, that drove him forward to the opening. Faintly now, he could still hear the weird rhythmic walking sound, but it came from afar, and Mr. Phillips wondered whether it could not be the far-off beating of the sea waves against the rocky coast. In his interest, he almost forgot Arnsley. Suddenly recalling his companion, the artist called loudly: "Arnsley!" and again, "Arnsley!" Mr. Phillips threw himself to the floor and bent his head to look into the black, yawning chasm below the corridor's stone floor.

What happened next is very vague in Mr. Phillips' mind. He maintains that he saw nothing, but there was an awful, a ghastly stench that met him full as he looked into the blackness. There came a sharp succession of faint screams, and a low, horrible moaning that sent the artist stumbling and blinded out onto the highway, where he fell prone in the welcome glare of an oncoming Daimler.

MR. PHILLIPS lay for weeks in a state of delirium. From scraps of mumblings that the artist gave issue to while delirious, investigators branched their work to the abbey on Lord Leveredge's estate. The inscribed slab was in its place, but by depression of a slab in the sill of one of the windows, the inscribed slab was forced upward. In a moldy crypt below, the barely recognizable body of Arnsley was found. There were peculiar marks all over the body, as if tiny suckers had attached themselves to its pores. He was devoid of blood, and most of the bones of his body were crushed. The coroner's inquest decided that he had met his death at the hands of persons or things unknown. The equipment found in the abbey, together with the artist's canvas, was returned to Mr. Phillips. Mr. Phillips hardly recognized the canvas as his work.

It was two months before the artist, still weak, was released from the hospital. Mr. Phillips immediately entrained from Manchester to Wallington, where he called upon Father Richards, from whom he hoped to gain some slight knowledge of the horror at the abbey. There was something about the painting, too, that Mr. Phillips had discovered after a close scrutiny.

Mr. Phillips found the priest quite willing to talk, and the artist let him ramble on for some little time before he came to the canvas. He produced it suddenly, and showed it to the priest, whose chubby face plainly showed his utter astonishment.

"Why, my dear sir," he said in awe, casting a suspicious glance at the artist, "this is an almost perfect reproduction of a scene that you could never have seen. There is a reversal of the cloister walk and door; you have painted it as it was in the old temple, not as it is now—

and there are a hundred odd details. The picture you have here is that of an old Briton-Romanized temple to a strange pagan deity—the God of Life, more often called the God of Blood by the worshipers and present-day archeologists. I have a picture of the god somewhere; you understand, a picture drawn from imagination. It makes me shudder. It's in color, and shows the god with his black-robed attendants. The god is like a huge black-green jelly, and seems equipped with minute suckers and tentacles, much like an octopus. It resembles a sea creature very much, giving off a blue-gray light, and flaring a bright green from its eyes. It is said to have been fed on blood.

"Since the abbey is not far from the coast, there are many archeologists who maintain that there was once an underground passage from the sea to the abbey, connecting, they say, to a crypt below the corridor. I don't know, of course. One thing puzzles me about the whole business; did the Christians know of this devilish worship or not?

"If not, who in the world put that Latin inscription on that slab in the corridor?"

The Malignant Invader

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

A story of a horror from the depths, by the author of "The Space-Eaters"

PROFESSOR WILLIAMSON sat on an overturned dory and watched the tide recede with sullen resentment. He was alone on the beach. The bathers had dispersed and the tide was ebbing very rapidly indeed. Gloomily he ran his gaze over the long stretch of exposed flats, noting here and there the presence of small jelly-like substances of grayish hue which clung tenaciously to the mud and resisted the suction of retreating waves. He speculated for an instant as to what they could be. They didn't precisely resemble jelly-fish and they were certainly not mollusks. Sea-weeds, probably. Well, it didn't matter.

What concerned him primarily for the moment, what irked and embittered him beyond all telling was the reception which forty uninformed and hideously bigoted zoologists had accorded his: *The Subterranean World—a Note on Its Strange Inhabitants.* He had delivered his address before the Ocean City Association for the Advancement of Science, and so carefully had he prepared and verified all of his notes that he had confidently anticipated endorsement for even the most audacious of his views. But his oration had been greeted with shouts of derision and he had been driven from the hall by a torrent of impatient abuse. The sun and the sharp sea air had a trifle restored his frayed nerves, but his thoughts were all despondent. He held in his hand a typewritten copy of the address which had cost him his reputation. He had been re-reading it aloud, and carefully re-weighing, by the light of all his experience, every startling assertion on every page save the last. That page contained a summary of his views, and so overpowering had become his emo-

"The professor's fright was ghastly to witness."

tion on approaching it that he had been obliged to raise his eyes and stare for a moment at the receding tide. And it was during that moment of bitter despair that he had noticed the clusters of grayish ooze on the rapidly widening flats.

"It can not be denied," he read, returning at last to the sheet in his hand, "that men and women have, at various times and in various places, disappeared. Simply disappeared. I have cited numerous authorities in support of my contention and I'm sure you will concede that I have made out what a jurist would call a prima facie case.

"It is my conviction that we are encompassed by forces of the utmost malignancy and that we would go mad if we could see the shapes which burrow and tunnel their way through the earth beneath our feet. I believe that sentience and even intelligence can exist apart from the protoplasm which is the basis of biologic life and that from depths of the sea and from cracks and fissures in the crustal earth there emerge from time to time forms which can not be described or envisaged. They are survivals, I believe, of earlier cycles of animate evolution than that with which we are familiar, combinations of matter and force, of matter and energy, that attained to intelligence when

the earth was still a molten furnace and before the first of 'living' cells were evolved from the intertidal scum of warm oceans. I contend that before protoplasmic life appeared on this planet a more hardy intelligence-containing vehicle existed—that billions of years ago it walked or crawled through the appalling heat of the primordial and incandescent globe. Then, as the earth cooled, it found conditions on its barren surface no longer bearable and went tunneling in the depths. It still exists in the depths, and from time to time, in remote and sparsely settled sections of the globe it creeps to the surface momentarily and surveys the world which it has lost. At such times, if any man happens by, he will be seized and carried downward into the abyss.

"The existence of malevolent entities lurking beneath the surface of the earth is the chief reason why devils, goblins, demons and demigods are accorded such conspicuous emphasis in primitive mythologies. I believe that such primordial entities have appeared frequently to men, and that they are the cause of the mysterious disappearances of which I have spoken. I have culled sufficient data from the evidence of the witnesses to such disappearances to convince even the most resolute of skeptics that such a creature as I have postulated is in sober reality a denizen of our planet and that it is a constant menace to all who walk the earth. From the depths it rises, seizes its prey and descends. In shape it is apparently somewhat analogous to man—having a head, four limbs and an elongated body, but in substance it is made not of living matter but of a fetid and muculent substance unknown on the earth, a substance that resists fire, is impervious to cold and is revolting beyond description. It is said by those who have seen this horror that it drools fetor and is luminous in the dark."

Professor Williamson sighed deeply and returned the paper to his brief-case. "It is the boast of modern biology that it seeks earnestly to solve the problem of life's origin and that it is receptive to all evidence that has passed the test of inductive scrutiny. But when I spend years in interviewing reliable people, when I relate merely what cool, sane observers have seen and heard I am called a lunatic and an impostor!"

He rose angrily to his feet. "I should have laid my observations before the Society for Psychical Research," he muttered.

Sunset was purpling in the west as he turned to depart. Gulls were running agilely across the shiny strand and great clams, deeply embedded, spouted jets of steamy vapor. Taking out a handkerchief he wiped the mist from his glasses and set off in the direction of the boardwalk. But he had not advanced more than a dozen paces when something seized him about the leg.

CLINTON WILLARD JONES gripped the rail of the boardwalk till his knuckles showed blue. His lean, spectacled features were convulsed with horror and his shoulders were jerking in a most erratic way. He had lingered on the boardwalk for the mere privilege of watching Professor Williamson. Having glimpsed the bowed, despondent figure sitting athwart the dory he had stopped an instant to stare, and then, as recognition dawned, had loitered to observe and marvel. He knew Professor Williamson by sight and he was fascinated by so rare an opportunity to study great genius in its unguarded moments. The Boswell impulse being for the moment paramount in him, he wondered precisely how such a man, a man of the caliber of Einstein and Eddington, would behave when he thought himself alone and unobserved.

Young Jones was standing within

twenty-five feet of the extraordinary man, and as the boardwalk was completely deserted he was privileged to study attentively every gesture that the professor made and to store up his impressions for systematic analyzation. He watched Williamson's expression change from resentment to pride as his gaze shifted from the sea to the paper in his hand, and then back again to bitterness as he shoved his lecture into his brief-case and got angrily to his feet.

Yet despite the fervor of his hero-worship young Jones was not insensible to certain disturbing occurrences which were taking place at the same time on the flats. Like Professor Williamson he had noticed the clusters of grayish ooze on the gleaming strand and had speculated as to their origin. And like Williamson he had at first dismissed them as of no consequence. But when the distinguished biologist arose to depart he noticed something in connection with them that drove the color from his cheeks and awoke in him a stupefying and overpowering revulsion.

Slowly, so slowly at first that they seemed scarcely to be moving, the clusters emerged from the sand and went squirming about in the air. The spectacle of a quiescent jelly rising from the ground and lashing about with no visible support was so alien to Jones' experience that he began perceptibly to tremble. Vehemently staring, he strove to convince himself that the clusters were at least tenuously supported, that some definite linkage existed between the jelly-like masses and the soft wrack beneath them. He was for an eternity convinced that nothing but empty air streamed between the sand and the jellies, but by dint of much visual straining he at last made out that attenuated, thread-like stalks ascended from the beach to where the latter danced about in the air.

It was an enheartening discovery but it proved only momentarily reassuring. For no sooner had the linkage become visibly apparent than the shape from which the stalks grew rose into view. A face, ropy and gelatinous, with glazed, purulently gleaming eyes and slobbering, shapeless mouth emerged from the dark sands and glared at Professor Williamson with a primordial ferocity. But the professor was bowed above his lecture and never so much as suspected that anything was amiss.

Jones clung to the rail, and attempted, frantically, to shout a warning. But his mouth refused to open. It was filled with his tongue, for one thing, his tongue which had swelled to such inordinate proportions that it kept getting between his teeth. And the breath had somehow all vanished from his lungs. He could only stare in feverish impotence, stare and stare as the enormous green body of the horror emerged above the sand and two long and gelatinous tentacles shot out and seized the professor about the ankle.

The professor's fright was ghastly to witness. He screamed and shrieked and threw up his hands and strove frantically to escape from the creature's embrace. But relentlessly the thin, terrible arms closed about him, squeezing the breath from his body and binding his arms so closely to his sides that he was rendered powerless.

Gray jelly masses on tentacles danced all about the horror's body. And high above its head other jelly masses squirmed and quivered and shook as the stalks supporting them responded to the creature's exertions. Its head, in profile, was revoltingly cephalopodan. A parrot-like beak curved above its cavernous mouth and the base of its neck was perforated by a series of gill-shaped slits which exuded a dark and oozing fetor. But what filled the wildly terrified youth on the boardwalk with the most paralyzing revulsion was

the thing's body. It was bloated and serrated and vaguely reptilian in contour, with a protruding navel and leprous razor-shaped shoulders and it glistened shockingly in the twilight.

The thing had emerged merely to its waist, but its tentacular agility was fearsome and appalling. Relentlessly, hideously the screaming professor was jerked across the sands toward its scaly bulk.

Jones shut his eyes. A nasty horror was fussing and churning at the back of his skull and his heart was flopping about in the most alarming manner. For several seconds he remained thus sightlessly immobile. Then, with a tremendous effort, he directed his gaze once more toward the horror on the beach.

But the professor had disappeared. Only the beaked and hooded head of the monster was visible, and that, too, was rapidly sinking from sight. All about it the mud bubbled aggressively, whilst greenish vapor swirled and eddied above its squirming antennal jellies. In a moment only a low depression on the glistening sands remained to mark the spot where the professor had confirmed, albeit reluctantly, the verity of his claims.

Sobbing and shouting the young man descended from the boardwalk and ran out across the beach. He advanced to the very edge of the depression and falling upon his knees began hectically to upheave with his hands great clots of sea-drenched mire. His eyes were aglow with despair and his chest heaved tumultuously. But though he cleared a great, circular pit for yards about him and descended into it up to his waist he encountered no vestige of the horror.

Desisting at last, he clambered from the pit, brushed the sand from his clothes and made his way sorrowfully toward the professor's discarded brief case. Its flap, in falling, had come open, and *The Subterranean World—a Note on Its Strange Inhabitants,* was scattered promiscuously upon the beach. Reverently Jones collected the precious sheets and returned them to the portfolio. Then, wiping a tear from the corner of his eye, he walked with averted head back to the boardwalk. Sorrow and remorse racked him—a consuming pity for a great talent prematurely effaced and remorse for his own cowardice in succumbing to hysteria at a moment when a single shout would have averted the tragedy.

2

CLINTON WILLARD JONES cautioned his friend severely. "It will rise in a moment," he said. "But you must stop fidgeting about. It is essential that you remain immobile until it is completely clear of the sand. I assure you that it can't reach you with its tentacles. Professor Williamson was sitting much closer. You see that boulder over there? That's where he was sitting. The thing will have to emerge completely from the sand to capture you."

Jones' friend groaned audibly. He was a tall, very pale young man, a little older than Jones, with intelligent, scholarly blue eyes, an extremely resolute-looking mouth and an expansive, prematurely furrowed forehead crowned by curly auburn hair.

"I was an idiot to allow you to inveigle me into this," he muttered. "I don't credit one word of Williamson's thesis, but at the same time——"

"I tell you I saw it."

"That's just it. You saw enough to convince me that there is something disturbingly strange lurking here. But I don't believe for a moment that it is a manifestation of the horror which Williamson has described. A hitherto unclassified species of cephalopod, I'd say. Some repellent survival from the upper Silurian. From what you have told me it is clear

that the creature is disgustingly like an octopus and won't be pleasant to encounter. It was positively inhuman of you to suggest that I serve as bait."

"But you are armed, you know. You can riddle it with bullets."

"But didn't Williamson claim that the horror was impervious to that sort of thing?"

"But you don't believe in Williamson's claims—you are convinced that the horror is protoplasmic."

Symons gazed steadily into Jones' eyes. "But *you* believe that it is primordial and virtually indestructible," he exclaimed.

Jones winced before the reproach in the other's gaze. He turned away and began nervously to pace the beach. "I swear to you that I am not sure," he said. "If I had been wholly sure I would not have asked you to do this thing. And I only ask it now because there is so much at stake. The safety of a world, perhaps.

"If the horror has emerged once it will emerge again. And it may make—depredations."

"And you think that by dynamiting its lair——"

Jones nodded. "We can prevent it from returning to the depths from which it draws its sustenance—freeze and destroy it even if your bullets prove ineffective. I do not believe that it can exist for long on the earth's crust. Williamson affirmed that when the surface of our globe cooled it went tunneling in the depths. Apparently it can not survive without more warmth than our temperature affords."

Symons frowned. "Precisely how do you intend to proceed?" he inquired.

"I shall wait beneath the boardwalk till the creature has emerged from the sand. It will advance rapidly toward you, and when it is completely clear of its lair I will press down the lever of the dynamite control. The charge which we laid this morning is of sufficient strength to blow its sanctuary to fragments. If the horror returns to the tunnel before the explosion occurs it may escape unharmed, but we shall at least have clogged the passage so that no other horror can ascend by the same route.

"It is probable that some fissure or crack has opened far down within the globe's crust and that some old imprisoned horror of inner earth has emerged through it. I do not believe that we can actually destroy the fissure with dynamite, but it is quite possible that we can clog its upper levels. I believe that beneath the depression in the sand which you see there"—he gestured toward the spot where the horror had risen on the previous day—"there extends an unbroken tunnel—a tunnel running down to incalculable depths and giving into a world of ghastly dimensions and unspeakable shapes—a veritable Gehenna of malign survivals from the earliest ages of the earth."

3

SYMONS had been sitting for fifteen minutes on the stone when the monster rose into view. When he saw its vast scaly bulk he had a momentary impulse to rise and scream, to rise and run frantically toward the spot where his friend was standing. But by a tremendous effort of will he conquered his agitation and waited with valiant fortitude for the horror to advance.

Swiftly the tentacles came gliding toward him over the sand. An odor, fetid and indescribable, surged from them, whilst from the revolting body to which they were attached came a hoarse gurgling sound which gradually increased in volume until it drowned out the excited shouts of the watcher beneath the boardwalk.

Soon the horror was within a foot of

Symons' legs. Resolutely, holding his trepidation very firmly to him, the young man rose from the stone and leveled his revolver at the creature's head. Three shots rang out in rapid sequence.

The young man beneath the boardwalk almost bit his lips through in the intensity of his agitation. The shots had apparently pierced the hideous invader. Its great body heaved and trembled and a purple froth gathered ghastlily on its bulbous mouth. But it did not, as Jones had avidly hoped, retreat or collapse. Only for an instant was the progress of its tentacles arrested. Before Symons could so much as raise his arm to take aim again they fastened tightly about his ankles and he was jerked relentlessly toward the depression in the sand.

The silence on the beach gave way to shrieks as the stricken youth dropped his revolver and clutched desperately at whatever might serve to impede the progress of the arms that were dragging him to annihilation. His hands fastened for an instant frantically about the base of a clump of beach grasses, but so terrifically potent was the force which animated the jelly-like tentacles that the weeds were torn from the sand, roots and all, and he was jerked forward with a hideous velocity.

Beneath the boardwalk Jones bent and laid his hand on the handle of the dynamite control. For an instant he feared that he would lack the strength to shove the lever downward. A veritable cyclone of trepidation had him in its grip; ribbons of sweat were running down his face and his limbs were shaking in a most sickening fashion. He knew he hadn't an instant to lose, but somehow, somehow he couldn't press down the lever. Then, all at once, he looked up wildly for an instant and saw his stricken friend limp and helpless in the monster's grasp. The sight so appalled him that he experienced a sudden access of turbulent, unreasoning energy, and down, with all the vigor in his lean body, he pushed the refractory lever.

The explosion was thunderous. Thin yellow flames seemed to dance for an instant in the air above the pit where the horror hovered; then everything on the beach was wiped out in a billowy uprush of smoke and sand. Clear to the boardwalk the smoke swirled; high into the air shot a geyser of sand. Stones, too, were hurled upward, and dark fragments of less substantial shapes, amorphous and mutilated, dispersed in ascending crescents against the clear sky.

With quaking knees young Jones waited for the smoke to clear. Twice he attempted to cry out, but no sound came from his congested throat. He hoped, desperately, that his friend was safe, that he had been sufficiently far from the depression in the sand to escape the effects of the blast.

His anxiety was soon appeased. A shout pierced the curtain of smoke and young Symons came staggering toward him. His clothes were in tatters and his face blackened almost beyond recognition. But his eyes glowed exultantly in their grime-rimmed orbits, and his speech, when it came, held pæans of praise.

"You destroyed it!" he shouted. "You blew the vile thing to fragments!"

He tottered to where his companion was standing and sat down abruptly on the sand. "Nearly got me, too," he groaned. "The detonation was frightful. I thought I'd lost the top of my head—I had to feel for it," he smiled. "But I'm all right now. Will be, in a moment. Just a little faint——"

Jones nodded. He was too overcome to be of much assistance but he had sufficient presence of mind to withdraw from his coat pocket a small flask of brandy and hand it to the gasping man at his side. "That'll help," he murmured.

"I'm glad we got it. Glad. Damn glad."

FIFTEEN minutes later the two young men stood stoically on the sands and poked with a stick at a small fragment of black putrescent jelly. "It's utterly lifeless," said Jones, "but I don't like the looks of it. See how it changes color when I touch it. And it isn't as soft as it looks. I can indent it with the stick, but it's resistant, like putty, and hasn't anything like the flaccid fragility of such primitive protoplasmic tissue as one finds in most of the marine invertebrates. I'm actually inclined to believe that Williamson was right, and we have here something that trancends all normal experience."

The tremor in his voice belied the measured detachment of his observations. All about him lay similar fragments—all that the explosion had spared of Professor Williamson's monster. An enormous mass of heaped-up debris clogged the entrance to the thing's lair, and the tide was coming in with a promise of merciful concealment for a ghastliness hideous to contemplate.

Jones was working furiously with his stick to dislodge a hard object at the jelly's core. After a moment he pried it loose and drew it across the sand till it was free of the clinging slime. Then, stooping, he picked it up and handed it to his friend. "Professor Williamson's watch," he said, simply.

Symons paled.

"The thing has evidently this in common with us," said Jones: "it can only assimilate organic nourishment. It swallowed the watch, but retained it in an undigested state."

"I wonder," murmured Symons, gazing with horror at the still unprobed fragments of jelly on the sand beside them, "if it can digest bones!"

Jones shuddered. "I suggest," he said, with a grim finality, "that we let the tides give this—this uncleanliness a sea burial."

"I still believe," said Symons, as they walked slowly back to the boardwalk, that the creature was a cephalopod. Its arms were sheathed and hooked and it had the beaked head and tentacular agility of a true octopus. And its body was relatively compact and sac-like—another characteristic of the Octopoda. It was more lean and angular and—and loathsome, I concede, than any known member of the genus, but I don't believe we need create a new classification for it. I propose we call it *Octopus Williamsoni.*"

"And I propose," said Jones solemnly, "that we never breathe a word of what we saw here today. I do not intend to mutilate the minds of children by introducing to the world a horror more authentic and ghastly than the grimmest of fictional ogres. It is conceivable that Williamson would have wanted the facts made known, but Williamson was a colossal egoist intent only on self-vindication and he had no scruples about inflicting his theories on people too delicately sensitive to bear them with equanimity. He had the scientist's ruthless disregard for the awful consequences that occasionally attend such premature revelations of revolting truths. *I know* that deep beneath the earth's crust there lurks a tangible and malign entity endowed with a hideous intelligence and that science will eventually awake to the menace which its presence there implies. But I refuse to shoulder the responsibility of revealing what I know to a world that is at least comparatively sane."

"Rubbish!" retorted Symons. "It is a pity," he muttered, after a moment, "that we didn't secure a photograph of the thing. No one will believe that it is even a *new* octopus without a photo."

The Haunted Chair

By GASTON LEROUX

A startling novel of thrills, eery murders and weird horrors, by the author of "The Phantom of the Opera"

The Story Thus Far

GASPARD LALOUETTE, a dealer in antiques, and officer of the French Academy, witnesses the spectacular death of Maxime d'Aulnay, who crumples to the floor while making his speech accepting election to the Academy. Two weeks before, Jean Mortimar was stricken dead in the same place, under the same circumstances. Each had received a letter by special messenger just as he was about to begin speaking, and each had opened the letter and read its contents. Death followed within a few minutes. Each man had been elected to the seat in the Academy formerly occupied by the late Monsieur d'Abbeville.

Eliphas de la Nox, writer of books on the occult lore of ancient Egypt, had been a candidate for d'Abbeville's seat, but received only one vote. Eliphas had muttered, after his defeat: "Evil be to those who sit in that chair before I do!" He had then disappeared, but the French newspapers blamed him for bringing about the deaths of those who had been elected to the seat which he coveted. They referred to d'Abbeville's seat as The Haunted Chair, and predicted that Eliphas would bring strange death to any who sought to occupy it.

Heedless of the threat, Martin Latouche accepted election to d'Abbeville's seat. Hippolyte Patard, Secretary of the Academy, went to Latouche's house at night to notify him of his election, and had a strange experience with Babette, Latouche's housekeeper. She told him a weird tale of an organ-grinder, who played under her master's window the same tune that had been played by organ-grinders during the Fualdes murder to drown out the screams of the victim. He learns from her that Mortimar and d'Aulnay had visited Latouche before their deaths.

Latouche is found dead in his study, bending over the hand-organ, which is grinding out the death tune. Lalouette examines the hand-organ, looking for a possible cause of death. He then makes a night trip to the suburbs to interview the great Lonstalot, scientist and member of the Academy, seeking his advice as to what had caused the three murders.

---

6. *A Scream in the Night*

THERE appeared at the gate the pink, smiling face of the famous Lonstalot. He was about the same height as the Great Danes, and he presented a strange picture as he walked forward between their terrifying jaws.

"So you were the one who examined the hand-organ?" As he asked the question, those two little eyes whose expression was usually so dreamy, so far away, suddenly became lively, piercing, bright.

"Yes, my master, I did," Lalouete answered, with another wide sweep of his felt hat in the icy air.

"Good, come in. It's too cold outside," and Lonstalot drew the bolt which locked the gate.

"Come in," was easy to say, if you happened to be friend of Ajax and Achilles. The moment the gate was

This story began in WEIRD TALES for December

"He started for the door, but the dogs quietly took up their position in front of him."

opened the two dogs leaped and Lalouette thought his last hour had come. At a signal from Lonstalot they stopped abruptly.

"Don't be afraid of my dogs," he said; "they're as gentle as lambs."

Summoning all his courage, Lalouette went in. Lonstalot closed the iron gate after them, and led the way. The two dogs followed and Lalouette didn't risk looking back. They all went up the steps and into the house.

The house was impressive—a handsome, wide-spreading country estate, solidly built of brick and granite. In the garden and court there were many small buildings—laboratories where Lonstalot worked out those experiments in chemistry, physics and medicine which were to be so beneficial to mankind. Because of his suspicious nature he never would allow any one to work with him—he had to work quite alone. So the year round, here he lived in the big house with only one servant—the giant Tobie.

"I'll show you to the drawing-room," said Lonstalot. "We can talk better up there."

Lalouette followed him upstairs, and back of Lalouette, the two dogs. They continued on up to the second floor, where under the roof was Lonstalot's big drawing-room. He pushed open the door. It was unfurnished, except for a table and one or two wicker chairs, and there were no pictures on the walls. The two men went in, followed by the two dogs.

"It's pretty high up," said Lonstalot, "but when I make my visitors wait in the attic they can't disturb me while I'm working down in the cellar. Sit down, my dear Lalouette. I've not the least idea

why you've come here, but I'll do anything I can for you. I learned by the papers, which I read from time to time——"

"I don't, my dear master. I never read them, but my wife reads them for me. In that way I don't lose any time."

He said no more. For while he was speaking, suddenly Lonstalot's entire expression changed. His small body stiffened up on his chair as though he had become a wax figure, and his eyes, up to this moment so sparkling and lively, fixed themselves on space, as though he were trying desperately hard to catch some distant sound.

The two dogs opened their enormous jaws and let forth a long, slow, melancholy yowl, as though announcing a death.

Surprized, then frightened, Lalouette, usually well self-controlled, rose. Motionless on his chair, Lonstalot kept listening as though for some sound coming from a great distance. Finally he seemed to come back from another world, and with the staccato movements of a jumping-jack he pounced upon the dogs and pounded them so hard with his fists that they quieted down.

Turning to Lalouette, he ordered him to sit down, too.

"Now then," he said in a rough, most unpleasant voice, "hurry up. I've no time to waste. Speak—that business at the Academy is most unfortunate . . . those three deaths . . . but there's nothing I can do about it. . . . It's to be hoped that it'll not go any further. Otherwise, as my good friend Patard says, where would we be, where would we be? . . . What have you to say, Monsieur Lalouette? . . . You examined the hand-organ? . . . And you said—I read it in the papers—you said 'Oiy, oiy.' . . . Tell me, what do you really think?"

In a voice all at once gentle, almost child-like, he added, "Funny thing, the story of that murder tune!"

"Isn't it?" Lalouette answered, forgetting for the moment the two dogs that sat staring at him. "It's concerning that matter that I've come to see you . . . that, and the secret of Toth . . . since you say you read the papers."

"Oh, I skim through them, since I've no Madame Lalouette to read them to me. I've no more time to read them, believe me, than you have, and I've no idea what you mean by your secret of Toth."

"Oh, it's not my secret. If it were I would be omniscient. But I can tell you something about it."

"Let's not get away from the point. Is there any connection between the murder tune and the secret of Toth? What's your idea in coming here to see me?"

"To ask you, as a great scientist, if a human being who knew the secret of Toth, could kill another by means unknown to other men. Could Martin Latouche have been murdered? Could Maxime d'Aulnay have been murdered? Or Jean Mortimar, could he have been murdered?"

LALOUETTE had scarcely finished these impressive questions when Ajax and Achilles again opened wide their massive jaws and let forth a roar more ghastly even than the one before. Lonstalot went pale; again his eyes stared into space as though trying to catch some distant sound.

This time he didn't try to quiet the watch-dogs, and as they howled Lalouette thought he heard another shriek, more terrifying, more horrible—a shriek that sounded as if it came from a human being.

Lonstalot's eyes again glittered; he

coughed a dry little cough and said, "Certainly not, they were not murdered . . . that's not possible."

"No, it isn't, is it? It's not possible!" Lalouette exclaimed, "and there isn't anything in that secret of Toth."

Lonstalot scratched the tip of his nose and said, "A-hem . . . a-hem."

Again that vague, far-away look reappeared in his eyes. Lalouette kept on talking but it was evident that Lonstalot heard nothing . . . even seemed to have forgotten that Lalouette was there. Indeed, so completely had he forgotten that he got up and quietly withdrew, without excusing himself or saying the least word of good-bye to his guest. He shut the door after him, and Lalouette found himself alone with the two huge dogs.

He started toward the door, but the dogs quietly took up their position in front of him. Nervously, he began to call Lonstalot by name. But not for long, for his shouts angered the dogs and they showed their teeth. He stepped back; he opened the window in the hope of hailing the giant. But he saw no one . . . nothing but an expanse of snow, a great white silence . . . and darkness rapidly closing in around him.

Consumed with a thousand fears and dripping with perspiration, he turned away from the window. The dogs being quiet again, he thought to make friends with them by patting them. They only snarled ferociously.

Suddenly a terrible human wail resounded through space, and again Lalouette shivered to the marrow of his bones. He ran to the window; he looked across the white desert which had vibrated with that frantic cry, but all he could hear was the horrible, redoubled howls of the dogs. Limp, he sank onto a chair, and covered his ears with his hands. He heard nothing more; and so that he would not see the gaping jaws of the mastiffs, he shut his eyes tight.

The door-knob rattled; some one was coming in. He opened his eyes; it was Lonstalot. The dogs quieted down. Everything was quiet—nothing was ever stiller than that house.

"Excuse me for leaving you alone for a moment," said Lonstalot pleasantly. "When I'm in the midst of an experiment . . . but you weren't alone . . . you had Ajax and Achilles to keep you company. They're real home dogs."

"My dear master," Lalouette answered in a changed voice, a voice calmed by Lonstalot's more agreeable manner, "I've just heard a terrible shriek."

"Not possible! Here?" answered Lonstalot, surprized.

"Here."

"But there's not a soul here but my old Tobie and me, and I've just left him."

"Then it must have come from somewhere around here!"

"Probably . . . some poacher down by the river . . . some quarrel with the watchman. . . . But you, you are all a-tremble . . . pull yourself together . . . it's nothing serious . . . I'll close the window. . . . There now, we're by ourselves and we can talk sensibly. . . . Wasn't it a little foolish on your part to come here to ask me what I thought of the secret of Toth, and the murder tune? That Academy affair is bad enough of itself without all this silly talk about their Eliphas and their Taillebourg, and I don't know what all, according to good old Patard. It seems he's sick, poor Patard."

"Sir, it was Raymond de la Beyssière who advised me to come to see you."

"Raymond de la Beyssière—the idiot! A friend of the Princess Bithynia . . . a member of that Pneumatic Club . . . he

makes tables turn . . . and they call him a scientist! He should know all about this secret of Toth . . . what did he send you here for?"

"Well, it was like this: I went to see him because for several days now every one had been talking about the secret of Toth. I must explain to you that Eliphas, whom every one began by making fun of, now seems to have frightened every one. His laboratories in the Rue Hachette have been searched and there, in mysterious terms, they found formulæ which are not as innocent as one might think. It appears that he combines something of physics and something of chemistry, and makes living people pass to a land of death."

"In that case," laughed Lonstalot, "he's got a formula for making cannon powder!"

"Yes, but that's a well-known formula, whereas there is a formula, it seems, which every one doesn't know, and which is the most dangerous of all . . . that's the one called the secret of Toth. They say that that mysterious formula is written on all the walls of the laboratory in the Rue Hachette. Lawyers, forced by public opinion, newspaper men and I myself asked Raymond de la Beyssière, our most brilliant Egyptologist, what it was, this secret of Toth. He answered, 'This is the secret of Toth: If I will it, you shall die by the nose, the eyes, the mouth and the ears, for I am master of the air, of light and of sound.' "

"Wonderful type, that old Toth," said Lonstalot, shaking his head half seriously, half jokingly.

"If one can believe in de la Beyssière, one must admit that this Eliphas was the inventor of magic. He was the Greek Hermes and a great person. His formula has been found written in Sakkarah on the walls of the crypts of the pyramids of the Kings of the 5th and the 6th Dynasties—and that impressive formula was surrounded by other formulæ which warded off snake-bites, the stings of scorpions and all animals with hypnotic power."

"My dear Lalouette," said Lonstalot, "you talk like a book. It's a joy to listen to you."

"I'm blessed, my dear master, with an excellent memory, but I'm not vain of it. I am appealing to you humbly to find out what you think of the secret of Toth. Raymond de la Beyssière does not hide the fact that the *letter* of the famous secret, inscribed on the tomb, was followed by mystic signs like our algebraic and chemistry signs over which generations of Egyptologists have pored. And he said that these signs, which give the power of which Toth speaks, have been deciphered by Eliphas de la Nox. The latter swears to it and when his private papers were being searched in the Rue Hachette there was found a manuscript entitled, 'From the forces of the Past to those of the Future,' which would tend to make one think that Eliphas had really penetrated the thought of that time. You know, of course, that the earliest Egyptian priests had already discovered electricity?"

"You're a ninny, Lalouette," said Lonstalot. "But go on; you amuse me."

Lalouette was speechless but after a moment went on.

"This Monsieur Raymond de la Beyssière is very sure of his ground." And then he added, "They may also have known of the immeasurable forces of dematerialized matter, which we have only just discovered and perhaps, even, they had measured these very powers—which would have opened great possibilities to them."

Lonstalot scratched the tip of his nose, and let out this undignified observation:

"You said it!"

Lalouette didn't even change expression; he merely said, "Of course, this must seem absurd to you."

"Right you are, my boy."

Lalouette smiled pleasantly.

"Your cynical tone doesn't annoy me. I have come round to being just as impressed as everybody else. Do you know what happened? The moment people heard the text of the secret of Toth, 'You shall die, if I wish it, by the nose, the eyes, the ears, and the mouth, for I am the ruler of air, light and sound'—at that very moment there were some people who said they could explain the whole thing."

"Indeed?"

"When Eliphas, for instance, said he was the ruler of sound, immediately they recalled Babette's story of the murder tune. And they said that Eliphas or the organ-grinder had put something into the mechanism of the organ, *a power which kills as it sings,* one which was possibly enclosed in the box which was later taken from the organ. That's why I asked to examine the organ."

"So then, Monsieur Lalouette, you find this incident interesting?" the scientist asked in a savage voice which completely disconcerted poor Lalouette.

"Not any more than any one else," he answered, embarrassed. "But . . . you see, I too sell hand-organs . . . antiques . . . so I wanted to see——"

"And what did you find out?"

"Listen, master. . . . I didn't see anything in this organ . . . but I found in one side of it . . . a thing like this."

He drew from his vest pocket a long, narrow tube, shaped like a cone, looking a little like the mouthpiece of a wind instrument.

Lonstalot took it, looked it over and gave it back.

"It's some sort of mouthpiece for a trombone."

"I think so, too. But that mouthpiece fitted marvelously over a hole in the hand-organ and I never knew an organ to have a mouthpiece like that . . . you will excuse me, won't you? But, haunted by the silly stories I had heard, I said to myself, 'That mouthpiece was perhaps put there with the intention of directing, in a certain way, the sound that kills.' "

"Yes? Well, you're just as silly as all the others . . . and what are you going to do with the mouthpiece?"

"Nothing at all," answered Lalouette as he mopped his brow, "nothing at all, and I'll have nothing more to do with that organ if a man like you, for instance, tells me that the secret of Toth——"

"Is the secret of fools . . . good-bye, Monsieur Lalouette . . . good-bye. . . . Ajax, Achilles, let the gentleman pass."

But now that Lalouette was free to leave, he didn't want to.

"One more word, my master . . . and you will have appeased my conscience in a way you can not suspect . . . but I'll explain to you later."

"What is it?" asked Lonstalot, stopping at the head of the stairs.

"Just this: those who said that Eliphas was able to kill Martin Latouche by means of the murder tune, swore that Maxime d'Aulnay was killed by means of rays of light."

"Rays of light, was it? . . . You should be locked up in an asylum! Why rays of light?"

"Yes, that's true. By means of a special apparatus some one directed at him some light rays previously poisoned. A ray of light struck him while he was reading his speech. Before he fell to the floor, it was recalled, he made a gesture as though to brush a fly off his face; in reality the bright light was troubling him."

"Ah . . . it was sent . . . so, in the eye?"

"Finally, according to the secret of Toth, one may be killed through the

mouth or the nose. These idiots—for they can't be called anything else—these idiots, my dear master, chose death through the nose for Jean Mortimar."

"That was a very appropriate end, my dear sir," answered Lonstalot, "for the poet of *Tragic Perfumes.*"

"That's true. *Perfumes are often more tragic than one might think.*"

"Stuff and nonsense."

"Laugh, my dear master, laugh. But you're going to laugh still more. These men swear that the first letter sent to Jean Mortimar, containing the terrible inscription about perfumes, is authentic, and in Eliphas' handwriting; but that the second was sent only as a bad joke. In his letter Eliphas enclosed insidious poison, like those used by the Borgias. You must have heard about them."

"Very bold, I'll say."

YOU might have expected that the scorn with which Lonstalot answered Lalouette's serious questions would have exhausted the patience of the antique and art authority. On the contrary, that authority could restrain his happiness no longer. He clasped the great Lonstalot in his arms. He embraced him so violently that the famous little scientist kicked with all the power of his short legs.

"Let me go," he cried, "let me go, or I'll set my dogs on you!"

But—by a miracle—the dogs were no longer there, and Lalouette's happiness was complete.

"Ah," he kept saying to himself, "what a relief . . . how good you are . . . how great . . . what a genius!"

"You're mad," said the angry Lonstalot when he could at last free himself. He couldn't understand what was happening.

"No, they're the ones who are crazy. Keep on telling me that, my dear master, and then I'll leave."

"Of course, they're all mad."

"Ah, yes, all of them are mad, I repeat it, all, all mad."

"All mad," the scientist echoed.

And both together joined in the chorus, "All mad! All mad!"

Finally, Lalouette took his leave, all politeness. Lonstalot went down to the court with him and there, noticing that night had already set in, he said to Lalouette, "Wait a moment, I'll get a lantern and go with you to the end of the street. I don't want to have you fall into the river."

In a moment he came back with a small, lighted lantern. He opened and closed the big gate himself. The giant Tobie was nowhere to be seen.

"Who said that this man was always dreaming?" said Lalouette to himself. "He thinks of every little thing."

They walked on for about ten minutes. When they reached the Marne they found a comfortable path. Before leaving Lonstalot, Lalouette offered his apologies once more for having taken so much of his time.

"It's plain to see, my dear master, that our wonderful Paris has sunk very low. Here we have three perfectly natural deaths. Instead of explaining them, as you and I do, in a reasonable light, Paris would rather believe in some quacks who arrogate to themselves a power that would make the gods blush."

"Insolence!" was Lonstalot's last word and he hurried back with his lantern, leaving Lalouette, completely dumfounded, standing alone in the darkness on the banks of the Marne.

In the distance flickered the light in the lantern; it danced . . . played, and then that light, too, disappeared. Suddenly a terrifying shriek, the great cry of death, a human yell, echoed and reechoed in the distance; this was followed

by the long drawn-out, desperate baying of the watch dogs.

Lalouette, panting with the horror of that terrible howl, suddenly stopped. Then it seemed that the shrieking of the beasts was coming nearer and nearer . . . he turned and fled as fast as his legs could carry him.

7. *The Man Who Could Not Read*

UP TO now the members of the French Academy had always been referred to as the Forty Immortals. But now the die was cast. Every one spoke of them as the "Thirty-Nine," never the "Forty."

Many months had passed since the tragic death of Martin Latouche. Not another soul had presented himself as a candidate for the Haunted Chair! It was becoming more and more evident to the public, following the three mysterious deaths, that no one had the courage to seek the fortieth seat.

What a pitiful plight the Academy faced! On occasions which ordinarily the Academicians would have graced with their presence, they now would feign sickness, or dig up a suffering relative in some distant corner of the world so as not to have to appear in public wearing oak leaves on their heads and the pearl-handled sword at their sides!

The investigation had been rapidly brought to a close and the affair duly pigeon-holed.

It was apparent that the only memory of that terrible incident, an incident in which an over-imaginative public had seen only crimes, was that of *the chair that brought bad luck.* And if that unexplained triple murder had ever had anything sinister about it, it was all forgotten now in that expression—uttered with a smile—*"The Thirty-Nine."*

Things had come to such a pass that when other vacancies occurred, the members had to seek candidates for these chairs—while all this was going on, two or three chairs had become vacant. Opportunity was never lost to poke fun at them for offering themselves for any chair except that of d'Abbeville—the Haunted Chair.

Hippolyte Patard had changed greatly. Up to this time Patard had been a man of two colors—pink and yellow. Now there was another—a third—and it could hardly be called a color; rather it was the ashen shade of the Greek Goddesses of Purgatory.

Following the death of Martin Latouche his remorse was so terrible that he took to his bed, and in his delirium they heard him accuse himself over and over for causing the death of the poor old man. He kept on pleading with Babette for forgiveness. It was only when his colleagues convinced him that the Academy had never had greater need of him, that he rose from his bed and resumed his beloved tasks.

One day as several members of the Academy were sitting in a disgruntled mood they were startled by the entrance of an apoplectic Hippolyte Patard. The secretary was speechless with excitement; he kept waving a slip of paper in the air, but not a sound escaped his trembling lips; finally, they got him into a chair; they snatched the sheet of paper out of his hand and this is what they read:

> I have the honor to present myself as a candidate for the chair left vacant by the deaths of M. d'Abbeville, M. Jean de Mortimar, M. Maxime d'Aulnay and M. Martin Latouche.
>
> Jules-Louis-Gaspard Lalouette,
> author, officer of the Academy
> 32 bis rue Laffitte, Paris.

They looked at each other in a kind of dumb surprize! Then they threw their arms around each other's necks and, like schoolboys, danced for joy. Since then, if one academy member wishes to express his great happiness tangibly to a fellow

member, he speaks of the *embrace Lalouette.*

They laughed, they hugged each other; then all seven present laughed some more. For there were only seven. Lately their meetings had been so dreary that few troubled to attend them.

Those seven decided to go at once to call on Jules-Louis-Gaspard Lalouette. They were anxious to size him up without delay; to pledge him to their academic fate.

THEY waited only until Patard regained his self-control; then they hurried away in two taxis. How they discussed him!

In the first taxi they said: "Just who is this Monsieur Lalouette, author? The name sounds a little familiar. It seems to me I noticed his name in the papers in connection with some recent work."

In the second taxi, one of them said: "Wasn't it rather strange that he should write his title after his signature! 'Officer of the Academy?' "

"Only shows he's a very intelligent man who wants to have us understand that he's already one of us," said another.

And they found life very sweet.

Monsieur Hippolyte Patard, though, was silent. His joy was too personal and too precious to be dissipated in mere words.

Unlike the others, he didn't ask, "Who is this Lalouette? What has he had published?" That was of no consequence at all. What was important was that he was the *Fortieth Member,* and for that very reason he must have genius.

So they reached no. 32½ rue Laffitte, a very nice-looking house. To the superintendent's question as to whom they sought, they answered, "Monsieur Lalouette."

"He's probably in his shop."

All seven looked at each other, amazed.

"In his shop? Monsieur Lalouette, the writer?" There must be some mistake. So Patard explained that they wanted to call on a Monsieur Lalouette, who was an "officer of the Academy."

"Yes, that's the one. I think he's in his shop. The entrance is on the street."

All seven bowed to the good man, all equally astonished and deeply deceived. They reached the street, and stood before an antique-shop over the door of which they read: "Gaspard Lalouette." In the windows were displayed some odds and ends of bric-à-brac, and an old, faded oil painting.

"They seem to sell a little bit of everything here," said one of the party as he drew down the corners of his mouth.

"Something very strange about this," said the chancellor. "That man's card has 'author' on it."

Patard broke in sternly. "I beseech you, my friends, don't be discouraged."

He opened the door, the others followed him into the shop in silence.

From the rear swept toward them a white-haired matronly woman wearing around her neck a handsome heavy gold chain.

Patard bowed ceremoniously, and said they wished to speak to Monsieur Lalouette, author, and officer of the Academy.

"And whom shall I announce?" the lady asked.

In the tone of a sergeant on parade, he ordered:

"Announce the French Academy!" And as he said it, he fixed his eyes on his little battalion with an expression which seemed to say that one false move from them would land them all in the police station.

The lady gasped. One hand dropped on her opulent bosom; she stifled a little

cry; her head began to swim. Then she disappeared into the shadows from which she had come.

"That's probably Madame Lalouette," said Patard. "She's very nice."

Presently she came back, and with her a mild little man wearing a handsome heavy gold chain across his rounded stomach. As pale as marble he came, speechless, toward his visitors.

Patard tried to put him at his ease.

"You are, sir, Monsieur Gaspard Lalouette, officer of the Academy, author, who wishes to apply for the chair left vacant by the death of Monsieur d'Abbeville? If so, sir"—Lalouette, unable to speak, could only nod his affirmation—"the Director of the Academy, the Chancellor, my colleagues and myself, Monsieur Hippolyte Patard, the Perpetual Secretary, offer you our most sincere congratulations. Your example proves that there will always be found in France a citizen whose courage and intelligence put to shame the stupidity of the masses."

As he spoke he shook hands solemnly and impressively with Monsieur Gaspard Lalouette.

"Well, say something, Gaspard," said the white-haired lady.

Lalouette looked at his wife, then at those distinguished gentlemen, then at his wife, then once more at Patard, whose kindly expression gave him some confidence.

"Sir," he stammered, "I'm quite overwhelmed by this honor. Allow me to introduce to you the missus."

The lightest possible smile played across the lips of the chancellor and the director at the expression, "the missus." But one ominous glance from Patard brought them back sharply to the seriousness of the occasion.

Madame Lalouette bowed and said:

"The gentlemen would probably like to talk things over without being disturbed. They will be more comfortable in the back room." And she led them to the back of the shop.

Even Patard had been slightly amused by that "back room." But the distinguished members of the Academy found themselves in a veritable little museum, in which everything was arranged with the best of taste. The walls were hung with priceless paintings and tapestries; and on the tables were exquisite pieces of old lace, little bronze statues, beautiful carved boxes—choice bits of all kinds.

"Oh, Madame, so this is what you call your back room! You are too modest. There's not a drawing-room in the whole of Paris that has so many beautiful, rare and artistic objects as you have right here."

"As fine as anything in the Louvre," said the director.

"That's what I'm always telling my husband!" spoke up Madame Lalouette. "I've just made him understand what I mean, so the next issue of the directory will not read: 'Gaspard Lalouette, art dealer,' but 'Gaspard Lalouette, collector.'"

"Madame," cried Patard admiringly, "you're a wonderful woman!" And he kissed her hand.

"Oh, but then he'll be a member of the Academy!"

A sudden silence fell on the group. They cleared their throats nervously. Patard, a severe expression in his eye, took a seat.

"Sit down, all of you," he ordered; "we must talk seriously."

Madame Lalouette fingered her handsome heavy gold chain. Beside her, Gaspard Lalouette riveted his attention on the Perpetual Secretary. He wore the anxious expression of a dull little schoolboy face to face with the examiner.

"Monsieur Lalouette," Patard began,

"you are a writer; you love books, and you have already published something."

"I have published two books," said Lalouette, "which, if I may say so, have been very well received by the public."

"Good; and their titles?"

"Concerning the Art of Picture-Framing."

"That's fine!"

"And another on the authenticity of the signatures of our greatest painters."

"Splendid!"

"Of course, these are not books for the general public, but all art-lovers know them!"

"My husband is very modest," said Madame Lalouette, toying with her gold chain. "We have a letter of congratulation from a gentleman who knows the real value of my husband's work. I refer to the Prince de Condé."

"The Prince de Condé!" exclaimed the academicians, on their feet at once, as one man.

"Here's the letter," and as she took it from her full blouse, she added:

"It never leaves my possession. Next to Monsieur Lalouette, it's the dearest thing I have in the world."

ALL the visitors examined the letter. It was from the prince and was couched in most flattering terms. There was great rejoicing. Hippolyte Patard seized Monsieur Lalouette's hand and almost shook his arm off.

"My dear colleague," he said, "you're a real hero!"

"Indeed you are, a real hero!" came in chorus.

"And," Patard clinched the matter, "the French Academy will be honored to welcome such a hero to its bosom."

The academicians, curious to know how Monsieur Lalouette stood in regard to the recent regrettable incidents in the Academy, had only one fear—that he would change his mind about becoming a member. They questioned him deftly and then let him talk. In the meanwhile they were appraising him and they found him good. But their approval was soon to turn to a profound admiration for his learning.

Patard and the chancellor fell into quite an argument over the difference between the meaning of the words "jowl" and "cheek-pouch."

It was Lalouette who cut the discussion short. He explained that "Cheek-pouch" was a noun in the feminine gender. Pockets, which monkeys and other prehensile animals carry under the cheeks on each side of the mouth. These pouches are reservoirs in which to stow foods not in immediate use. In the case of bats they assist flight, permitting the introduction of air under the skin.

Even though they were Academy members they had nothing to refute such learning. But soon their admiration was to turn to consternation when with the greatest historical accuracy, he used the exact technical term for a curious table the members had noticed in his collection. He quoted the great name of Vitruve as his authority. At the mention of that world-renowned name, they all bowed their heads, except Patard, whose eyes glistened with satisfaction. Vitruve had conquered him.

"At last, a man worthy to sit in Monsieur d'Abbeville's chair!"

Now they addressed Lalouette with great respect. In a few minutes these gentlemen, slightly self-conscious and fearing to make some slight slip in grammar, took their leave. They congratulated Lalouette; they all kissed the hand of "the missus" who, since her husband's display of erudition, seemed to them a most imposing person.

Patard did not leave with the others.

Lalouette had indicated there was something important on his mind.

Lalouette got rid of Madame Lalouette.

"Run along, little girl!" he said to her.

"What can I do for you, my dear colleague?" he asked anxiously.

"There is something I must tell you in confidence; it is between you and me; but I must keep nothing back from you . . . between us we might be able to adjust certain little embarrassments . . . as, for example . . . the speech."

"What's that . . . the speech? . . . What do you mean, my dear Monsieur Lalouette? I don't understand . . . don't you know how to write your speech? . . ."

"Oh, yes, yes, certainly . . . that doesn't worry me."

"Well, what is it then?"

"It must be read?"

"Naturally it's much too long to learn by heart."

"It's just that that's worrying me so much, Monsieur Secretary Perpetual . . . *because I don't know how to read.*"

8. *Eliphas de la Nox*

PATARD jumped as though he had been lashed across the legs.

"It can't be true!" he cried.

He thought Lalouette was having his little joke. But not at all. Lalouette dropped his eyes and his expression was almost pathetic.

"No, I can't read, not at all," he said, looking more and more like a scolded child. "I'm not joking. It's the truth."

As Patard saw by his look that he meant what he said, he shivered from head to foot. "A candidate for the Academy who doesn't know how to read!"

He sank into a chair and sighed, "Am I losing my reason?"

A deep silence fell.

It was Lalouette who spoke first.

"I would have kept this from you as I do from everybody else, but you, as Perpetual Secretary, you will receive my mail, you will surely have occasion to communicate with me in writing. I knew you would discover my secret . . . why don't you say something? . . . is it my speech that's worrying you? . . . that's simple: you can write one that won't be too long, and I can learn it by heart. . . . I'll do anything you want me to . . . only please say something. . . ."

But Patard was too overcome for speech. He couldn't get hold of himself. He had been through many strange things during the last few months, but nothing to compare with this blow . . . a candidate for the Academy who didn't know how to read!

"Good Heaven, this is terrible! Amazing! A candidate who can't read! Everything else is all right . . . excepting . . . he can't read . . . my God! . . . this is awful!"

Furious, he turned to Lalouette.

"How in the world does it happen that you don't know how to read? It isn't possible!"

A very serious expression came into Lalouette's eyes as he answered:

"It's because I never went to school. When I was six years old my father made me work like a slave in his store. He said he'd made a success in life without any schooling and he didn't see why I needed any. He was a dealer in antiques and he made me learn his business. I didn't know one letter from another but even when I was ten you couldn't fool me on the signature of a painting. That's the reason that even though I can't read a word I can appraise works of art so well that even the Prince de Condé defers to my judgment."

That last phrase made its intended impression on Patard. He got up, paced up and down the room. Lalouette looked at

him out of the corner of his eye. Suddenly he turned on Lalouette in a fury.

"Why did you tell me this?" he demanded. "You didn't have to tell me."

"I thought it was the honest thing to do."

"Oh fiddlesticks! . . . I would have found it out of course, but afterward . . . and then it wouldn't be so important. Listen . . . let's make believe you've said nothing about it. Will you? For my part, I don't know anything. I'm a little hard of hearing and I didn't hear anything about it."

"It's just as you say. I've said nothing to you, Monsieur Perpetual Secretary, and you've heard nothing."

Patard breathed easier.

"It's certainly hard to believe. To see you and to hear you, one would never suspect it," and he drew another sigh of relief.

"And you certainly talk like a very learned man. . . . I can tell you now, Monsieur Lalouette, we weren't very much impressed when we came into your shop, but later you certainly overwhelmed us completely by your knowledge . . . and now I find out that you can't even read!"

"I thought, Monsieur Secretary Perpetual, that you had just decided to know nothing about it."

"Ah, yes, true, excuse me, but I shall remember it all my life . . . a member of the Academy who can't read!"

"Still," said Lalouette, smiling, "in this world one must get used to many things. And, if to be an Academy member, one has to be learned, I certainly showed those gentlemen that I have as much learning as they have."

"You certainly did. Where did you learn so much about what you were telling us?"

"In the Larousse Dictionary, Monsieur Secretary Perpetual. "

"In the Larousse Dictionary?"

"Yes, Larousse . . . illustrated."

"Why the illustrated edition?"

"Because of the pictures. Not knowing the significance of those little things you call letters, the pictures help one a great deal."

"And who helped you to learn Larousse by heart?"

"The Missus, Madame Lalouette herself. When I first decided to present myself as a candidate for the Academy, that very day we decided on that course."

"From that point of view, it would have been better to memorize the dictionary of the French Academy."

"I did think about that," Lalouette agreed with a smile, "but you would have recognized the wording."

"True," said Patard, made thoughtful by that last remark. How intelligent this man was, how foresighted, how courageous! There were plenty of Academy members—he knew them well—who could read, it is true, but who weren't worth Lalouette's little finger.

"I'm still only on the A's," the latter interrupted him, "but I'll be finished with them soon."

"Oh, yes, yes . . . yes . . . I see."

Patard rose, he opened the street door and took a deep breath. Next he looked up and down the street, at the passers-by, the houses, the sky, Sacré Cœur, and its cross outlined naked against the sky. By an association of ideas he thought how many people were bearing their crosses without complaining. The situation couldn't possibly be more terrible for a Perpetual Secretary. He made a brave resolution. He went back to the man who couldn't read. He took his hand. "We shall meet again, very soon, my dear colleague," he said.

He went out on the sidewalk, absentmindedly opening his umbrella. He was

all worn out and dragged one foot after the other.

HARDLY had the door closed after him when Madame Lalouette came running in, breathless.

"Well, Gaspard?" she begged.

"It's all right. He called me 'dear colleague' and said we'd 'see each other soon.' "

"And . . . he knows everything?"

"Everything."

"That's the best way. Now, if some day anybody finds out anything there'll be nothing surprizing about it. You will have done your duty. He's the one who will have failed in his."

Beaming with joy, they kissed each other.

"How do you do, Mr. Academy Member!" said Madame Lalouette in the first flush of her pride.

"It's all for you, my dear," answered her husband.

And this was the truth; he was doing all this for her. She, who had married him because he had written books, was an author, had never been able to forgive him for having hidden from her that he could not read. When at last he admitted it there were some harrowing scenes in that home. Then she tried to teach him to read. It was a waste of time. The alphabet went along smoothly enough, but he couldn't put syllables together—b a, ba; b i, bi; b o, bo; b u, bu—he had begun too late; he simply couldn't get them into his head. That was a pity, for Monsieur Lalouette was an artist and he loved beautiful things. Madame Lalouette took to her bed, declaring she would not agree to get well until the day Lalouette should be chosen officer of the Academy. The day he won that title she began to love him a little more.

But even though the years had passed and he tried to be interested more than anything else in literature, there was always this terrible secret poisoning the marital bliss of the pair—Monsieur Lalouette, recognized as an author, didn't know how to read!

This was the situation when the mysterious deaths so upset the Academy and the public. By the merest chance, Lalouette had been present when Maxime d'Aulnay died. Lalouette was neither superstitious nor stupid. He saw nothing supernatural about the death of a man who had heart trouble and who must have been unstrung by the tragic death of his predecessor. Why every one should get so wrought up he couldn't understand and all that nonsense about a sorcerer who had disappeared made him smile. Nor could he understand all the haunted chair hubbub in connection with d'Abbeville's seat. Finally Lalouette said to himself, "It may be strange, but I haven't the least fear about that chair! My, but it would surprize Eulalie!" calling Madame Lalouette by her pet name.

He didn't tell his spouse what he had in mind, but he was surprized when he learned that Martin Latouche, quite naturally, agreed to election to the so-called fatal chair. He wanted to be present at Latouche's installation. What he was thinking nobody knew. Was there, deep in his heart, the hope (unexpressed of course) that Destiny—always whimsical—was about to turn another trick? Who can say, without being unjust? At all events, Lalouette was present when old Babette, dishevelled and wild, rushed in to announce her master's death.

However much self-control we may be born with, there are some things that affect us deeply. From the moment that Lalouette escaped from all that roaring mob he began to take a vital interest in

the mysterious Eliphas. Where had he come from? He asked every one he thought might know about him, including members of the Pneumatic Club. He went to see Raymond de la Beyssière; he found out about the Secret of Toth. He asked permission to examine the hand-organ. Finally, he took the train for La Varenne-St. Hilaire, and if he came back a little undone by his reception there, he was thoroughly persuaded of the foolishness of all those Egyptian beliefs. The moment had now come for him to talk over his plans with Eulalie. At first she was taken aback, but she had a strong will and she wanted him to carry out his idea; only he must proceed cautiously. That man Eliphas de la Nox—they must either find him or get some definite information as to his whereabouts.

Several months passed and then Lalouette became impatient. Learning that Eliphas called himself also Borigo du Carei, because he came from the valley of the Carei, Lalouette went there. In a little house sheltered by olive trees, he found the old mother of the famous magician. Quite innocently and frankly she said that her son, tired of Paris and the Parisians, had spent several months there with her and then had gone to Canada. She produced letters he had written her—letters which left no room for doubt that Eliphas was not interested in the least in d'Abbeville's chair.

Triumphant, Lalouette went back to Paris and sent the letter announcing his candidacy for that chair.

The incident had only one serious drawback—that was that Monsieur Gaspard Lalouette, candidate for membership in the French Academy, didn't know how to read. Aware of the fact that many people who knew how to read did not present themselves for membership, Monsieur and Madame Lalouette decided to put the whole matter up to the Perpetual Secretary. We've already seen how lightly he passed it over as being a mere detail.

And now the Lalouette family were very happy. They kissed each other, to show their joy, and over a fine supper could speak of nothing else.

"Tomorrow," said Madame Lalouette, her eyes radiant with joy, "tomorrow your name will be in all the papers; it will be on every tongue; you will be a famous man."

"And thanks to whom, little girl? To you, my dear, best and most intelligent of women—and fearless, too. You have always bolstered me up, encouraged me at every step, done everything to urge me on."

"And now we've nothing to worry about. We can put our minds at ease, now that we know that terrible Eliphas is well out of the way in the wilds of Canada."

"Madame Lalouette, I'm free to confess that after the third death, in spite of everything that queer old Lonstalot told me, I had to be more fully assured concerning Eliphas. If I had had any fear, for instance, that he was roaming around in the vicinity of Paris, I would have thought twice before proposing my name to the Academy. No matter how much of a wizard he may be, he is first a man, and so can commit murder like any one else."

"And even better than any one else," declared the good Madame Lalouette, a little smile, as reassuring as it was skeptical, playing over her lips, "especially if he can control the past, present and future, and the cardinal points of the compass."

"And if he knows the secret of Toth," added Lalouette laughing loudly and rub-

bing his hands together in glee. "But why must folks be so stupid, Madame Lalouette?"

"It's all the better for the others, Monsieur Lalouette."

"I, for instance, the moment I saw his photographs in the papers, I said to myself, 'The man that looks like that never killed any one.' "

"Yes, he has a handsome, distinguished-looking face, and very gentle eyes."

"With perhaps just a touch of something cynical in them, Madame Lalouette . . . just a faint something."

"Perhaps so, I'll not deny it . . . when he finds out that he's killed three men he'll laugh."

"But who in the world would tell him, Madame Lalouette?"

"His mother's the only one he writes to, the only one who knows his address. No one knows that she exists, not even the police. She knows nothing of what happened in Paris, and I certainly did not take the trouble to tell her. Anyway, he's lost to the world . . . way off in the wilds of Canada."

Madame Lalouette re-echoed, "In the wilds, deep in the wilds of Canada."

In their joy they clasped each other's hands. All of a sudden, as they were smiling at each other and repeating, "In the wilds of Canada," they felt each other's hands grow cold.

Their eyes had fallen on a face outside the window, on the sidewalk, looking into their shop—a face——

A face, a handsome and distinguished-looking head, and soft, expressive eyes . . . they both recognized that face . . . they couldn't be mistaken . . . they shrieked at the same moment.

It was Eliphas! Eliphas himself! Eliphas de St. Elmo de Taillebourg de la Nox!

He stood on the sidewalk as motionless as a statue. . . . He was perfectly dressed; he carried a cane in his hand, and a tan topcoat folded over one arm.

Monsieur and Madame Lalouette felt their knees give way beneath them. They could hardly stand up. Suddenly the man moved. He came forward with a slow step toward the door of the shop.

The door opened—he came in.

Madame Lalouette dropped limp in an armchair. Lalouette fell on his knees and cried:

"Pity, I beseech you, have pity!"

That was all he was able to say.

"Does Monsieur Gaspard Lalouette live here?" the man asked, not in the least surprized at the effect his entrance had produced.

"No, no, he doesn't live here!" Lalouette answered, still on his knees, and his lie sounded so sincere that he almost believed it himself.

The man smiled a cool little smile and with the greatest poise closed the door after him.

"Come now, Monsieur Lalouette, get up off your knees . . . pull yourself together and present me to Madame Lalouette. . . . Good Lord, man, I'm not going to eat you up."

Madame Lalouette gave him a quick desperate look. For a second the hope flashed through her mind that it might have been a resemblance—a horrible resemblance—that had deceived both her husband and herself. So, making a valiant effort to control her terror, she succeeded in saying in a bleating tone of voice:

"Sir, I beg you to excuse us. You're the perfect image of one of our relatives who died last year . . . alike as two peas. . . ."

She shook with fear; she could say no more.

"I quite forgot to introduce myself," said the man, steadily and calmly. "My name is Eliphas de Saint Elmo de Taillebourg de la Nox."

"Oh my God!" cried the two Lalouettes, and they shut their eyes tight.

"I understand that Monsieur Lalouette is a candidate for Monsieur d'Abbeville's chair."

The couple started.

"That's not true," whimpered Lalouette. "Who told you that?" But in his terror-stricken soul he said to himself, "He really is a wizard. He knows everything!"

The man, quite unmoved by these denials, kept right on.

"I came to congratulate you personally."

"It wasn't worth while putting yourself out," said Lalouette. "Some one has been lying to you."

The stranger looked around the room very carefully.

"But still I wouldn't be sorry to have a few words with Monsieur Hippolyte Patard . . . where is Monsieur Patard?"

Lalouette rose, livid with fear.

"Don't be afraid, Eulalie, my dear"—trembling, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead—"we're going to have it out with this gentleman. . . . Monsieur Hippolyte Patard, did you say? Never heard of him."

"Then they misinformed me at the Academy."

"Yes, yes, they certainly did . . . you're quite mistaken . . . they would have been pleased to have me present myself . . . to apply for one of their chairs . . . to make one of their speeches . . . and whatever else . . . but I don't want anything like that . . . nothing doing . . . I'm an art dealer, I am. . . . I earn an honest living, I do. . . . I'm just what you see, Monsieur Eliphas. I don't ask anything of anybody."

"Not anybody," Madame Lalouette backed him up.

"And I am certainly not going to begin at this stage . . . that chair is for you, Sire Eliphas . . . you're the only one worthy to have it . . . take it, sir; I want nothing to do with it."

"I don't either," said Eliphas in his most unconcerned manner. "You may have it if it would make you happy."

Husband and wife looked at each other, then at the visitor. He looked as though he meant what he said. He was smiling . . . but possibly he was laughing at them.

"Are you really serious?" Madame Lalouette asked him.

"I usually mean what I say," he answered.

Lalouette gave a start.

"We thought you were in Canada, sir," he said, regaining a little self-control. "Your mother——"

"Do you know my mother, sir?"

"Sir, before presenting myself to the Academy——"

"You are presenting yourself then?"

"I mean that, having the idea that I might present myself, I wanted to be sure it would not interfere with your plans. I tried to find you everywhere. So it happened that I met your mother, who told me that you were in Canada."

"So I was. I just got back from there . . . only this morning. I arrived in Havre. I've been living in Canada like a savage, and I've been absolutely uninformed about the silly doings in connection with Monsieur d'Abbeville's chair."

The couple began to breathe more easily.

"Oh, yes!" they exclaimed together.

"I lunched with a friend today who told me the sad story of the recent elec-

tions. I knew the officers of the Academy had been trying to find me, so I decided to put an end to the whole mystery by going at once to call on Monsieur Hippolyte Patard."

"Yes, yes."

"I went to the Academy this afternoon, and when I asked for Monsieur Patard the concierge told me that he had left with several other men. I told him my errand was pressing; then he said that I would certainly find them at 32 bis rue Laffitte, at the home of Gaspard Lalouette, who was to be the next occupant of Monsieur d'Abbeville's chair, and whom these gentlemen and the secretary wanted to congratulate at once. But I seem to have made a mistake about it, since you do not know Monsieur Patard," added Eliphas, smiling very lightly.

"Sir, he has just left here!" said Lalouette. "I'll tell you the truth, now! Yes, I did announce my candidacy for the chair. I was quite sure that a man like you couldn't be a murderer, that it was all the other people who were crazy."

"Bravo, Lalouette!" cried Eliphas. "Now you're talking like a man. If you want your chair, you shall have it. You have only to say the word and it's yours," and he went up to Lalouette and shook his hand.

"Take your seat in the Academy, Monsieur Lalouette, take it and have no fear. As for me, I assure you, I'm only a mere man like all the others . . . just for a brief moment, I felt superior to the rest of mankind . . . because I had studied a great deal and gone deeply into things. . . . My repulse at the hands of the Academy opened my eyes and I decided to punish myself, to humiliate myself. I went into exile . . . in the depths of Canada. I worked at the heaviest labor, just like the roughest trappers, and now I've come back to try to find a market for my merchandise."

"What are you doing now?" Lalouette asked. He was deeply stirred by the captivating story of the man whom everybody had been speaking of as the *Man of Light*. He felt privileged to be able to listen to it.

"Yes, my dear sir, what are you doing now?" asked Madame Gaspard, pleading with both voice and eyes.

Quite simply and modestly the *Man of Light* answered:

"I sell rabbit skins."

"Rabbit skins?" exclaimed Lalouette.

"Rabbit skins!" Madame Lalouette sighed as she said it.

"I am a dealer in rabbit skins," reiterated the *Man of Light*, bowing with dignity.

He was about to leave, but *Lalouette* detained him.

"Where are you going now? You can't leave just this minute. Would you allow us the pleasure of offering you a little glass of something?"

"Thank you very much. No, I never take anything between meals," Eliphas answered.

"Still, you mustn't leave like this," and Madame Lalouette began to urge him. "After all, there is a great deal we'd like to talk to you about."

"I think I know enough now," he answered quite frankly. "As soon as I have seen Monsieur Hippolyte Patard, I'll take a train for Leipzig to look after my fur business."

Madame Lalouette put her hand quietly on the door-knob to hold him back a moment longer.

"Excuse me," she said, her voice shaking a little, "but what are you going to say to the Perpetual Secretary?"

"I'm just going to tell him that I never

killed any one in my life," answered the *Man of Light*.

Lalouette went white.

"You don't need to," he said. "He never thought you did. It's quite unnecessary, I assure you."

"Still, it's my duty to reassure him just as I've reassured you and Madame Lalouette, and to banish once and for all these stupid suspicions now attached to my name."

Lalouette, his face utterly distorted, looked at his wife.

"Ah, my little girl," he sighed, "it was all only a too beautiful dream"—she put her arms about his neck; he buried his face on her shoulder and sobbed—"a beautiful dream."

Eliphas turned inquiringly toward Madame Lalouette.

"Your husband," he said, "seems to be in great trouble. I confess I can not understand. . . ."

"It means," answered Madame Lalouette, between sobs, "that when it is known that you are in Paris, that you have come back from Canada, and that you had nothing to do with those deaths in the Academy, Monsieur Lalouette will never be elected to the chair."

"And why not, pray?"

"Oh, they'll never elect him to that chair," she sobbed. "It's a terrible thing to say—but now no one wants it. Hold off, then, my dear Monsieur Eliphas. Wait a little before telling every one that you are innocent. Of course sensible people know it already. But wait just a little longer, until my husband is elected——"

"My dear lady," answered Eliphas, "don't take it so hard. The Academy will never be so unjust as to reject your husband—he who was the only one who came to their relief when they were in such dire need."

"I tell you, they won't elect him!"

"Yes, they will."

"No, they won't."

"Yes, they will."

Madame Lalouette turned to her husband. "Gaspard," she cried, "I believe what Monsieur Eliphas says. Tell him yourself why the Academy won't elect you if it can possibly find some one else . . . it's a secret, Monsieur Eliphas, a terrible secret which we had to confide to the Perpetual Secretary . . . but it must never go any further. Go on, Gaspard . . . tell him."

Lalouette tore himself from his wife's bosom. He put his hand over his mouth and very softly whispered something into Monsieur Eliphas' ear . . . so gently that nobody but Monsieur Eliphas could hear it.

At which Monsieur Eliphas de Saint Elmo de Taillebourg de la Nox, the man who never smiled, burst forth into peals of laughter.

"That's too funny," he said. . . . "No, no, my friend, I'll never say a word about it. You needn't worry."

He shook the hand of each as a pledge of his good faith. He thanked them for their hospitality, and assured them that nothing could make him happier than to see Monsieur Lalouette a member of the Academy. With great dignity he opened the door and went out into the street, at peace with himself and the world.

9. *Lalouette Becomes Afraid*

MADAME LALOUETTE had not exaggerated in the least when she said her husband would wake up the following morning to find himself a famous man.

For two whole months no man was more talked about than Monsieur Lalouette.

His house was never free of newspaper

men and his pictures in varied poses appeared in every newspaper and magazine. It must be confessed that Monsieur Lalouette took all this quite as a matter of course, as if it were his due. The courage he seemed to show in the circumstances aroused the public's admiration—"seemed to show," for as a matter of fact Madame and Monsieur Lalouette were now in nowise apprehensive of any vengeance on the part of Sire Eliphas. Although his visit frightened them at first beyond all belief, it had ended in assuring them of a peaceful and happy future.

That future was not long in coming. Monsieur Jules-Louis Gaspard Lalouette was unanimously elected a member of the illustrious Academy. Unchallenged by any rival, the palm of the martyr was his without dispute.

In the next few weeks not a day passed that Monsieur Hippolyte Patard did not drop into the shop. He used to come toward evening, and, to avoid being recognized, he would enter by a little side door, and sit in Lalouette's private room where they would not be disturbed. Here they were engaged in composing Lalouette's speech of acceptance. It was evident that when Lalouette said he had a good memory he was not boasting; it was excellent. He would know that speech by heart with no chance of error. Madame Lalouette took a hand at it, too. She recited the oratorical work of art to her husband—even in the conjugal privacy of going to bed and getting up. She also taught him how to handle his pages as though he were reading them, and just how to arrange them, one after the other. As a finishing touch she had marked the top of each page with a little red cross so that Lalouette would not hold his speech in front of him—and in front of everybody else—upside down!

The eve of the famous day—that day when all Paris was in a fever of excitement—arrived. The newspapers had installed their reporters in relays in the vicinity of his shop. After the three successive tragedies there was no doubt whatsoever that Monsieur Lalouette was doomed to an early death. They had to have reports of the great man every five minutes. When he appeared, quite fagged out, and finally retired to get a little rest, it was Madame Lalouette who had to answer all their questions. The poor woman was worn to a frazzle, but radiant, for Monsieur Lalouette was really feeling as "fine as silk."

"As fine as silk, Mr. Reporter . . . say that in your paper. He's as fine as silk."

Lalouette had thought it best to go away from home, for his fame was getting in his way. This was the very time he felt it imperative to be alone so that he could go over his discourse, giving laborious attention to intonation and gesture. He crept out, and succeeded in reaching the house of his wife's cousin who kept a little shop in the Place de la Bastille. Notwithstanding the distance which separated them, he was able to recite by telephone to Madame Lalouette the most difficult passages of that precious speech, the author of which, we know, was Monsieur Hippolyte Patard.

It had been arranged that that gentleman should join Monsieur Lalouette at about six in the evening at the Place de la Bastille. Everything seemed to be going very well, when as the two colleagues were talking quietly together the following little incident happened.

"My dear friend," Patard was saying, "you may be very happy. There will never be under the dome of the Academy a solemn meeting of such brilliance. Every member of the Academy will be there—every one. Each one wants to show

by his presence the especial esteem in which he holds you. Even the great Lonstalot himself has said that he will be there, although he seldom attends these meetings. The great man is very busy; he didn't even come to Mortimar's reception, nor d'Aulnay's, not even Martin Latouche's."

"Really!" said Monsieur Lalouette, who suddenly seemed quite embarrassed. "Monsieur Lonstalot will be there?"

"He took the trouble to write me."

"That was very kind of him, that . . ."

"What's the matter with you, my dear Lalouette? . . . You look as though you are worried."

"Yes, I am," Lalouette agreed. "It's nothing very serious. . . . I've been somewhat discourteous to the great Lonstalot."

"How so?"

"Before I became a candidate I went to see him to ask his idea of the Secret of Toth and of all that nonsense concerning Martin Latouche's death. He only laughed at that great scholar Latouche and abused him so that I was disgusted. It was then that I decided to become a candidate."

"I don't see anything in all that to worry about."

"Perhaps. But when I became a candidate I had to make the usual round of official calls on all the members of the Academy."

"Of course, otherwise you would have been guilty of the greatest rudeness."

"Yes, I know . . . and the one man to whom I should have shown the deepest gratitude was the great Lonstalot, but I've never made my call on him."

Patard couldn't believe his ears. "What, never called on the great Lonstalot!"

"Never."

"Monsieur Lalouette, you have broken all our rules . . . it is an insult to the Academy."

"But, Monsieur Secretary, nothing was farther from my mind."

"Why then, if I may ask, didn't you call on *him?*"

"I'll tell you . . . he has two mastiffs, Ajax and Achilles, who scare the wits out of me, and a giant named Tobie, who looks like a gorilla."

"You? . . . a brave man like you!" asked Patard.

Lalouette hung his head.

"I wish you'd seen their savage jaws and heard their howls—as though in the presence of death—and then the long, piercing shriek of a human being."

"A human being?"

"Lonstalot thought it might be some hunter along the river . . . but a cry as of some one being murdered . . . and imagine that deserted spot . . . and a house way off by itself. . . . I've never been able to muster up courage enough to go back."

Patard had sat down at a table meanwhile, and was consulting a time-table.

"Let's go now," he said.

"Where?"

"Out to call on Lonstalot . . . there's a train in five minutes . . . that will somewhat right the wrong . . . since you will not be a member officially until tomorrow."

"All right. I don't mind going if you do. But do you know those dogs?"

"Yes . . . and the giant, too."

"Fine . . . there's a good little restaurant near the station where we can have our dinner while we're waiting for the train coming back."

"That is, in case Lonstalot doesn't ask us to dine with him."

JUST as they were leaving for the station the telephone rang.

"That must be Madame Lalouette. I'll tell her we're going to dine in the country."

He took down the receiver and suddenly turned pale, then green.

"What's the matter?" asked Patard, who was standing close to him.

Lalouette leaned over.

"Don't hang up, dear. . . . You'll have to tell that to Monsieur Patard."

Lalouette turned to him.

"My wife has received a letter from Eliphas de la Nox," he spluttered, his hand shaking.

Patard took up the receiver, put it to his ear and went pale as he heard Madame Lalouette's voice reading the letter:

My dear Monsieur Lalouette:

I am pleased to hear of your success and I am sure that an intelligent man like you will in no way be apprehensive when about to make his speech. As you see, I am still in Leipzig; but I have been wondering of late if it is really quite natural that three candidates should die, one right after the other, just as each was about to take M. d'Abbeville's chair! There must have been a special motive behind these deaths. I take the liberty of calling your particular attention to this point. Just because I am not a murderer, is no reason why there are not other murderers in the world. . . . However, these remarks need not influence you in any way. Even if there were reasons for the deaths of your three predecessors, that doesn't mean there would necessarily be any reason for your meeting a similar fate.

Please give my best regards to Madame Lalouette.

Sincerely and hopefully yours,
Eliphas de Saint Elmo
de Taillebourg de la Nox.

On the train the two men sat deep in thought. Certainly the letter was full of uncontrovertible good sense. That phrase—*"Just because I'm not a murderer* is no reason why there are not other murderers in the world"—that was the phrase as it came over the wire that seemed to have seared itself into each man's brain.

Lalouette now began to ask himself if it was really worth all this to have been elected to the Academy.

Other phrases in the letter rang in their ears: "Is it natural that three Academy members should die, one after the other, just as they were on the point of taking Monsieur d'Abbeville's chair?"

But above all it was those last words that disturbed Lalouette.

"If there were reasons for the deaths of Mortimar, d'Aulnay and Latouche, there may possibly be none for Gaspard Lalouette's."

His thoughts raced on.

"May possibly be"—it was that "may possibly be" that upset him.

He looked at Patard, whose face now bore an expression of great anxiety.

"Listen, Lalouette," he said, "that letter may be rather serious, but I don't think we need be alarmed about it."

"Perhaps, but how can we be sure?"

"I have not been sure of anything since Martin Latouche's death . . . I've worried enough about him . . . I don't propose to worry about you, too."

"What's that?" Lalouette asked, raising himself up to his full height; "are you thinking of me as being dead, already?"

"No, not dead, my friend," said Patard, slowly, laying his hand consolingly on that of the newly elected member, "but I can not help thinking that the other three deaths were perhaps not so natural as——"

"The other three?" Lalouette shivered.

"Still, the words of this Sire Eliphas make one stop and think . . . and recall some things I thought myself . . . but tell me, Monsieur Lalouette, you didn't know Mortimar, d'Aulnay, or Latouche, did you?"

"I never spoke to one of them in my life . . . I give you my word, as a gentleman and a member of the French Academy."

"Splendid," said Patard. "Then there could be no connection between their fate and yours."

"You make me feel better, my dear

secretary, but do you really think there is any connection between those three deaths?"

"Yes, I do now, since hearing Eliphas' letter. We've all been so under the spell of that wizard that we've not looked elsewhere for the secret of that sinister mystery.

"Perhaps elsewhere there was a real reason. Now that I come to think of it, *those three men did not know each other.* Understand me well, Monsieur Lalouette —they did not know each other before the first election took place for a successor to Monsieur d'Abbeville . . . they had never seen each other . . . never . . . in spite of the fact that Latouche did not tell me they had been young men together . . . now then, after the election, they met, they saw each other secretly . . . first at one house, and then at another . . . everybody said they met to talk about Eliphas . . . to defy his threats . . . what nonsense! . . . they all must have feared a common danger . . . otherwise why their secret meetings?"

"Are you sure of that?" asked Lalouette, almost breathlessly.

"I just said so, didn't I? . . . I took considerable pains to find out . . . do you know where they met for the first time?"

"No, where?"

"Guess."

"How could I?"

"Well, then, it was right here . . . on this very train . . . by the merest luck . . . as they were on their way to make their pre-election call upon Lonstalot . . . naturally they all came back together . . . and before their mysterious deaths, something very terrible must have happened to them, because they always met in the greatest secrecy. . . . That's what I think, anyway."

"Perhaps you're right . . . something must have happened to them, something no one knew . . . but nothing has happened to me . . . not to me . . . not yet. . . ."

Just then the train stopped at their station and they started in surprize. Their thoughts had been very far from La Varenne; they weren't even thinking what they had come for. As they stepped to the platform, Lalouette said:

"If you knew these things when you first came to see me in my shop, why wait till the last minute? It's a damned rotten trick."

This story rises to a climax of shuddery horror in the concluding chapters in next month's issue. Read about the weird perils that beset Lalouette and Patard in the eery dungeons of Lonstalot, in the February WEIRD TALES, *on sale January 1st.*

"The head!" he exclaimed.

THE HEAD

By S. B. H. HURST

A strange story of psychic memory—every night, on the wall of Pilling's room, a severed head appeared

I AM a physician practising in Seattle, in the State of Washington, and specializing in nervous and mental diseases. I am fairly well known, chiefly because of certain papers I have written which deal with strange and weird happenings to certain of my patients—happenings which can not be accounted for by accepted scientific explanations, happenings which seem to be included in the word "occult," a word I had always detested and sneered at until compelled, if I wished to be intellectually honest, to admit that there were more things than my medical training dreamed of. One of the strangest of these happenings I will now recount.

It was in the autumn of 1919. A chilly, windy afternoon. From my desk I could see the whitecaps on the water of Elliot Bay, the wind-harried sea-gulls, the tossing boats. It was about four o'clock, and as I had no appointments I decided to go home. I had just risen with that in-

tention when my office girl knocked on the door and told me that a Mr. Pilling wished to see me.

"A patient or a life insurance salesman?" I asked testily.

The girl smiled.

"A pretty good guess, doctor," she answered. "He is both. No, he does not want to talk insurance—he wants to consult you!"

"All right!" I replied. "Show him in!"

A moment later Pilling came in, and the girl shut the door, leaving us alone. Pilling was a tall, blond, handsome man of about thirty-five. Healthy complexion, clear eyes that struck me at once as having a sort of haunting fear in them. He introduced himself, adding: "I am not here to try to sell you insurance, doctor, but to ask your advice."

"So my office girl said," I replied, looking into his eyes but making no comment upon the strain of terror in them. "Have a seat!"

And I indicated the deep leather chair by my desk, sitting in which the patient must face the window. There was some light left, and I did not turn on the electricity.

"Make yourself perfectly comfortable —smoke, if you wish—and try to relax," I said.

"I am not a coward, doctor," he blurted out as he sat down.

"What is called lack of courage is primarily due to lack of endocrine balance," I answered.

Pilling stared at me.

"I never had but a common school education, and not much of that," he said. "And I don't read much!"

I was glad I had been technical. Pilling's remark gave me a splendid insight into his character which was of great help. Here was no neurotic, no highly sensitive brain and nervous system. It struck me that he would have made an excellent prize-fighter.

"Well, what brought you to me?" I asked. "Here, have a cigar!"

He took the cigar, and I held a match for him. Again I noted the unusual fact that while he was in good physical shape, nerves well nourished and so on, the fear persisted in his eyes. A mental case entirely, I decided.

He took a pull on the cigar, smiled as if a bit ashamed of himself, and blurted out.

"It's a head, doctor!"

"A head?" I queried.

"Yes," he went on, eagerly now as if tremendously anxious to share his burden with me, to get relief by telling me. "Yes, doctor, a head that has no body. I see it every night as soon as I put out my light. I live alone. I am not married. . . . And, it's awful. . . . A head, bleeding at the neck—like a head just chopped off the body. . . . I—I am afraid to put out my light any more—sleep . . . try to sleep with the light full on. . . . God, doctor, it's driving me crazy!"

"You're a long way from being crazy." I put my hand on his arm; then I felt his pulse—it was only a trifle rapid. "You appear to me to be eminently sane!"

"It's no delusion, doctor," he exclaimed pleadingly.

"I told you you were quite sane," I continued to soothe him. "We will look into this. No use theorizing now, or giving you medicine, or anything. Where do you live?"

He gave me the name of his rooming-house, and his room number.

"Go and eat a good meal, and relax, if you can, and go to a show," I ordered. "I can not tell a thing about your case now, save to say you are sane as I am!" (I always say this, of course, but in Pilling's case I meant it!) "Yes, then

go home. I will come to your room at ten-thirty tonight. The only way to get at this is for me to be there when you see the head. You don't see it anywhere except when alone in your room, do you?"

"No, doctor!"

"Like to have me sit with you tonight?"

"My God, doctor, that's what I want more than anything else. I have thought of asking one of my friends to sit with me, but was afraid of being laughed at. Please come!"

"I will be there," I promised. "Meet me in the rooming-house office. . . . No need to let any one know you are consulting a doctor. As you say, this is best kept private. Have you told any one else?"

"Not a soul, doctor!"

"I will be there tonight," I said. "And don't let the thing worry you more than you can help!"

It was an ordinary, cheap room. A bed, bureau, wash-bowl. Plain yellow shades drawn over the two small windows. The walls covered with white kalsomine. A single electric light globe on an extension wire that led to the head of the bed where Pilling could reach it when lying down. Two chairs: one rocker, one morris-type.

"Now," I said, "let's go into this business. I want to avoid shock, as far as possible, but you have a strong heart and body, and the only way we can handle this affair is to investigate. You take one chair, I will take the other. You say that you see this head as soon as you turn off the light. Where does it appear to be?"

"On the wall there!" He pointed to a blank, square piece of wall on the side of the room opposite the windows. "It's just like seeing a motion picture over there—the wall the stage!"

This was unusual, distinctly so.

I put my bag on the bed, took out my hypodermic case and my clinical thermometer. All this more to make Pilling feel at ease than for any other reason. Many patients, who do not really require medicine, are aided by this "placebo" sort of treatment, and all think they are getting better service and have more confidence in you than when you omit external aids.

"Now," I said, "I will turn off the light, and you shall tell me what you see."

The house was in a quiet street. Now and then a passer-by, but few if any autos. From the main thoroughfare, three blocks away, came the occasional screech of a trolley car rounding a corner. A spatter of rain against the windows and on the roof, for the room was on the top floor. I reached out and snapped off the light. I put the fingers of my left hand on the pulse of Pilling's right wrist as I did so.

A gasp of terror from Pilling and a sudden acceleration of his pulse as the room became dark!

"The head," he exclaimed, obviously trying hard to keep his voice from rising to a scream, and magnificently succeeding. I admired him for it. A patient with guts, worth while! "The head! There," he leaned toward me, whispering in terror. "The bleeding head—like a motion picture!"

"Try and describe it!" I commanded quietly.

"It's"—he was sweating like an overdriven horse—"it's the same as usual. I seem to know the man! A long time ago . . . it seems . . . like he was . . . a very intimate friend . . . the eyes closed in death . . . a good-looking man . . . oh, but I know him well! . . . but I can't think who he is . . . can't remember his

name . . . he wears a beard . . . vandyke . . . dead and bleeding . . . fair hair, it seems . . . dead . . . like his head has just been cut off . . . still bleeding!"

I snapped on the light.

"Take it easy!" I said as quietly as I could, for, to tell the truth, I was curiously upset myself. This was no hallucination! A hallucination in a patient would not have affected me in the least. "Take it easy! You don't see anything with the light on, do you?"

"No, thank God!" he exclaimed, lying back in the morris chair.

"You're a damned game man!" I said, and I meant it. "A brave man!"

"I will go through with this, with your help, doc," he said. "Go through with it until . . . until we find out what it is. . . . It's no delusion . . . it's real. . . . I ain't crazy, am I, doctor?"

"You are most certainly not crazy," I comforted, and I meant it. "I am no hidebound materialist—I have been, but I have come to realize that there are many things our present knowledge has no way of explaining! Feel able to take another look? I am here to take care of you! I won't let shock go far enough to harm you!"

"Gee! It's good to have you here, doc," he exclaimed, like a boy. "When I faced this alone it was awful. It's bad now, but with you back of me . . . well, I can take another look, and tell you what I see!"

"Lie back comfortably in the chair, and tell me when you're ready," I said.

He obeyed. Then, gamely:

"Let her go, doc!"

I SNAPPED off the light again.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, fear leaving him, interest supervening. "The head's gone. . . . It's a sort of church . . . that's it . . . a little church . . . an altar . . . and a coffin . . . a large coffin lying in front of the altar. . . . No people . . . just the altar, the coffin . . . and candles on the altar . . . sort of sacred feeling, I get, doctor . . . like peace after agony . . . like being in a grand church in the evening!"

"Steady," I said. "Look carefully, so you will remember the church. An old sort of church?"

"Yes! . . . High roof . . . great beams . . . huge stone pillars . . . very sacred . . . and the coffin . . . somehow, I am not scared now!"

"You don't see the head, or any people?" I asked quietly.

"No! But, yes! The church and the coffin and the altar are fading out . . . just like a moving picture . . . it's all gone . . . now another picture . . . and, my God, doctor, I can hear things!"

I snapped on the light. Pilling was lying back in the chair, as if at a picture show, excited.

"Hear things?" I asked.

"Yes, doctor," he spoke eagerly. "Turn off the light. I am not scared any more. But, oh, I am so interested! For I seem to know the picture I saw . . . an old street . . . and what I hear is people walking on the stones of the street . . . walking and talking. Turn off the light!"

I turned off the light, still keeping my fingers on his pulse, which was quite rapid now.

"This never came before," Pilling was speaking slowly, as if to himself. "Never before! Only the head before this, but, then, I was afraid to keep on looking when I was alone! With you here I kept on looking. . . . A street! People! How queerly they are dressed! And . . . and, doc, there—there's the man with the head! That's the same head, but it's alive! It's him, walking along the street. . . . Fancy sort of dress. . . . See, the

people bow to him, salute him. . . . A fine, big man, with the same head . . . handsome, proud, haughty man . . . he walks along the street . . . I can hear his footsteps. . . . Let me see what he is going to do! Let me see what he is going to do—where he is going. . . . God, but this is interesting, better than any picture. . . . I know that man, doc, yes, I know him well . . . I like him, feels more like a brother . . . feels like he was more than a brother to me. . . . Let me watch!"

I said nothing, but I kept my finger on Pilling's pulse.

"Listen, he is talking to himself! It's in my ears, *just like as if I was doing the talking myself!* He says—listen—he says, 'Poor Francis, I must go and see him! As always he lacks money. I must try to help him—again!' . . . He talks to himself, and he walks along that funny old street, all mud and no sidewalk . . . quaint, wooden old houses. . . . He walks . . . people bow to him. . . . Ah, here is another building. A fine building, of stone. . . . He enters! A grand doorway. . . . See, an old man, a servant bows to him! He says, 'Is Sir Francis Bacon in the Inn, my man?' . . . And the old servant bows and scrapes, and says, 'Sir Francis is in his room, my lord. . . . I humbly give you good day!' Ah, the man with the head, the lord, tosses the old man a coin, and says, 'I thank you, my man.' He pauses to speak, 'And how long, my good man, have you been doorkeeper here in Grey's Inn?' And the old man bows to the ground and pockets the coin, and says humbly, 'Most of my life, and my father before me, my good lord.' And the lord smiles and goes in. . . . And now he is walking up a flight of wide stone stairs. . . . Don't turn on the light—let me watch."

I obeyed, speculations racing through my head. What did all this mean? Was it *memory?* I pushed speculations out of my head. I would do my speculating later on—after Pilling had told me more. But I felt that I was privileged to be a witness of the most remarkable experience ever given to mortal man.

Pilling's voice rose suddenly.

"By God, doctor—*I am that man . . . he is me!*"

"Watch, and tell me everything you see," I said, my heart beating as rapidly as Pilling's.

"He stops at a door, a great, solid door. He knocks, and a voice inside says, 'Come in!' . . . He opens the door. . . . A high, wide window, the sunlight coming through. A man at a desk writing. . . . The lord goes in, and shuts the door. . . . Over the door a sort of sign . . . it's a crest—a wild boar, a crest, a wild boar and something else that's faded. . . . He shuts the door, does my lord, and says to the man at the desk—a man with such a clever face, but tired—he says, this lord who is me, he says, 'Give you good day, my dear Francis, and what may you be writing now?' . . . The man at the desk seems ashamed. . . . Now he sneers, as if at himself; he says, 'You are my friend, and I will tell you what I am writing, e'en though it makes an outlaw of me in the eyes of magistrates—I am writing a play for the theater by the river!'

" 'My God, horrible!' exclaims the lord, who is me.

" 'It's horrible to be without money,' says the man at the desk. 'And that fellow Helmslow will give me five pounds for this!'

" 'But you can't do it, Francis.' The lord, who is me, seems terribly upset. He lays a hand on the shoulder of Francis at the desk. 'You must not do it.

It's too degrading. Stay, tear up such rubbish. I can let you have more money. Why, what will your family think, your friends? Writing for the theater! It makes you a vagabond, like the actors! Think of your family. There, your crest on the door. Why, it will degrade you and your family. It will kill . . . see the crest, Francis . . . what you are doing will be attacking the reputation of your family . . . the Lord Keeper, your father. . . . It will be like—like hunting your own people to harm them!' . . . He points to the crest, the wild boar. He speaks solemnly. 'What you are doing, Francis, will be like shaking a spear at the boar!'

"The man at the desk smiles.

" 'Then, as e'en I must, I will shake a spear at the boar!' Now he laughs. 'Not under my own name, though. Ah, a fine idea you have given me, Essex, saying that I will be endangering myself and family. You say I will be shaking a spear at the boar, my crest there. A good *nom de plume* you have suggested. For I will shake a spear at the boar—WILL SHAKESPEAR is the name I will write under!' Ah, doctor, the picture fades again. There is nothing there!"

I TURNED on the light.

"What does it mean? What is it? How does it come there on the wall? My God, what does it mean, doctor?" Pilling gasped, lying back in the chair.

"I don't know," I said solemnly. "And you are too tired, and I am too bewildered to discuss it tonight. Come to my office at ten in the morning. That will give me time to think. Somehow, I feel certain that the 'spell'—I have no better word!—is past. You will see nothing more tonight. I feel that you, and I with you, have been privileged beyond all other men. There is something religious about this, something marvelous beyond imagination and thought! Stay, I will turn off the light. . . . See anything now?"

"Nothing, doctor, it's all dark now. And I feel rested. I feel like a tired kid that has been crying about something. I want to go to sleep!"

"Turn in and go to sleep," I said. "Come and see me in the morning. You will sleep like a tired kid, and see nothing more on the wall this night!"

THE problem was intensely interesting. Of course Pilling did *not* see the pictures *objectively*. They were as entirely subjective as other memories. *But were they memories?* If you look back at some event in your life, some important event, say, like your wedding, you *see*, as it were, the happening *subjectively*. Like a picture. (Try it!) The clarity of such visualization is relative; with some brains it is vivid, with others almost nil. For instance, a great chess-player has played twenty games of chess simultaneously, *without seeing any of the boards*, and won against good players, *seeing the boards subjectively with the pieces moved when called out to him by the other players*, his opponents, who had the boards in front of them. Then there is "archaic" memory, which in my opinion explains that vague word *instinct*, and also seems to explain how it was that patients in delirium tremens saw flying lizards long before paleontology discovered and classified the fossils of the pterodactyl. The subject is vast, but Pilling's case did not, apparently, fit any known series. The fact of his apparently seeing the pictures on the wall of his room meant nothing. He had simply "seen" the head there first, apparently—he might have seen it anywhere—and the place aided his seeing by a sort of suggestion, much as a smell will revive memories of time and place. This will suffice just

now for what technical explanation seems required.

NEXT morning Pilling came to my office. His haggard face showed that I had been mistaken in supposing the head would not trouble him again the previous night. . . . I had a book to show him, but before doing this I had questions to ask him. But the rush of his words as he slumped, worn and weary, into the chair, put this off for a while.

"The head, doctor! The head! It laughed at me!"

"Laughed at you?" I asked, startled. "You must have imagined that!"

"No, doctor—it laughed!"

I took his pulse. His statement was of tremendous diagnostic value.

"It's getting you, and I don't wonder," I said. "Your saying it laughed is the first delusion you have indicated to me—not to be wondered at after such a strain."

"It's hell, doctor!" he groaned. "Can you do anything for me?"

"We must get at the cause," I replied evasively. "If we can fix that we will know how to proceed." I looked at him. He had not shaved. He was a sick man. "Let me ask you some few questions. Have you ever been in London?"

"Never been outside the State of Washington—born right here in Seattle," he answered.

"Ever hear of the Baconian theory?" I asked.

"No—what is it?" he said.

"The theory—held by many intellectual men, such as Mark Twain—that Francis Bacon, the man you saw writing last night, wrote the plays attributed to William Shakespear," I answered.

Pilling's brow wrinkled, puzzled.

"So," he said, "that was what . . . what I was roasting him about last night?"

"You mean Essex was telling Bacon not to write," I said.

"He and me are one," said Pilling, quite naturally. "I know it, and I feel it—but how, doctor, can that be, and what's wrong with writing plays—I seem to know there is, but can't quite remember?"

"Forget that part," I said. "But it's all like a memory, isn't it?"

"It is memory," he replied. "All but that head, *my head,* that scares me so!"

"It need not scare you any more," I said persuasively. "It's more than three hundred years since they cut it off!"

He almost leaped from his chair.

"Cut it off!" he exclaimed.

"Don't you know any English history?" I parried.

"No, doctor, I don't read much except the papers."

"We will get to this gradually," I said. "It's a big job. The curious part of your 'memories' is their coming in broken links: you saw the head (which is very puzzling), then a church, with a coffin, then heard and saw Bacon and Essex. . . . Ever heard of the Tower of London?"

"Yes," he answered.

I lifted a book from my desk.

"Look at the pictures in this book," I ordered.

I had given him an illustrated book on the history of the tower. As he turned the pages I studied him. . . . No, he was not faking—he was as natural as a child. He turned over the pages of the book, interested. His face brightened, as if he recognized places, then darkened as the memory failed. But suddenly he yelled.

"That's it!"

And he shoved the book toward me, his finger on a picture. "That's the church I saw last night, the altar where the coffin was!"

It is doubtful if in all the world's history such a wonderful statement had been

made before. For this man Pilling, who had never been in London, was pointing to a picture of the Chapel St. Peter ad Vincula, before the altar of which so many famous men and women lie buried!

"You saw the coffin of the Earl of Essex lying by the altar," I said very gravely. "Your own coffin, if your idea of identity is correct. But how that could happen is beyond my intelligence to imagine—as it is beyond me to understand how you could see your own head, after it was cut off! Unless we admit the soul of a man can see and remember. Yes, we must admit that. It is the only explanation! And we must also admit that the soul of a man is born and reborn on this world again and again—reincarnated! You have heard of that belief, have you not?"

Pilling shook his head.

"I never bothered about such things," he said slowly. "Of course I may have heard the theory. . . . Come to think of it, I have heard people kidding about their 'last time on earth,' but it didn't seem right—I was well brought up. I am a Baptist, and don't like such silly ideas about religion as people being born again!"

"I accept 'ancestral memory' as a theory," I murmured. "But even as a theory the idea fails in this case—for when a man's head is cut off he does not have children to inherit that memory. How could he, after his head was taken from his body?" Then aloud: "Try to put aside religious principles for a while—until we get this case of yours fixed up. For as I live and breathe, you were on this earth before, and you were Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, the ill-fated favorite of Queen Elizabeth!"

Pilling straightened up, some pride in his bearing.

"And now, as your doctor," I went on, "I am going to give you something to make you sleep. I have a couch here in another room. Tonight, with your permission, we will try to get to the bottom of this affair. Come with me into the other room!"

He did so. I gave him a hypodermic of morphine, and in ten minutes he was snoring.

WE MET in his room again that night, and I put out the light as before.

"The head," muttered Pilling. "The head again!"

And then, suddenly, his voice changed perceptibly. He got out of the chair and began to walk up and down the small room. I kept the room dark, and as he talked I understood. He did not know I was there. In fact, he did not know he was in a room in Seattle, in a cheap rooming-house in the far west of America in the year 1919. For psychically he was not in that room. He was again the Earl of Essex, and his soul again was in a narrow cell in the old Tower of London. He was re-enacting the last hour of his life. Far, very far from me was he as I sat and listened and watched his dim, moving figure in its somewhat shabby modern clothes. Yes, he was very far from me as I sat there entranced, too entranced to speak or move, afraid that even my breathing might break the spell. He was far away from me—in old London, thousands of miles away. But he was farther away than that. . . . For Pilling, life insurance agent of Seattle, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, was separated from me, although in the same room, by three hundred and eighteen years of time!

"I wonder," he said sadly, "if Francis has again betrayed me! There, little girl, do not weep. Little girl, with the now so white face, and the brown hands of work who so sweetly came here to my cell last night to comfort me. Kneel not, my

dear. See, let me lift you! Pray for my soul, an it pleases you to do so, dear, but it is vain to pray for my life. That small matter of living or dying lies in the clever —ah, too clever—hands of Sir Francis Bacon. There, little woman, sit on the bench and dry those eyes. Dost not understand how Francis can save or make me—how ere this he has done one of those unimportant things? The queen, you say. Gloriana! Yes, but what chance has any man or woman when Francis Bacon uses his brain! Listen, dear, sweet little comforter, whom I never saw before last night, and may never see again. And dry those eyes!"

The dim figure had stooped as if to help some one kneeling to her feet. With an exquisite courtesy he helped her—this long-forgotten, unknown little girl of love —to a bench that was never in that Seattle rooming-house. A girl, a bench and a cell I *felt* but could not see!

"He said everything would be all right. Send her the ring at the right moment and Elizabeth would melt and forgive. He called her 'an old hag,' when he said it. I gave him the ring, and he said he would give it to the queen. But Francis does not want me to live—I feel that in my bones. Else why did he speak so at my trial, when the judges were ready to acquit me? And yet, could any man be so perfidious? After all I have tried to do for him! . . . Don't cry, my dear. That's a brave girl. Your courage helps me. Aye, after what I have done. But once or twice he has told me, and written me not to talk so much. Talking, he said, was *one*—one, mark ye! —of my weaknesses. And he is afraid that I will talk. After all, why should he be so afraid? I am not the only man who knows he wrote the plays. Ben Jonson does—but, then, he can give Ben enough for drink and the rough bricklayer will be as the grave. They are all afraid of Francis, save me. Perhaps that is why. . . . But here they come—the guards—for my execution, my girl. . . . I wonder what Francis has done with the ring? . . . Never mind—I will waste no words now. To ask, to cry questions, to call for Francis on the scaffold were beneath me. Thank God, I can always find courage when I need it! . . . Kiss me, dear little love whose name I do not even know, last love of Essex, who has had so many. Good-bye, little girl!"

And now Pilling was walking slowly, as if to the block. Some words in a low tone—to the guards, I suppose. Then he talked, as if to himself.

"The trees, becoming green toward the spring. I shall never see the spring again. Never again. . . . This is strange—I have no fear of death at all. . . . God forgive you, Francis Bacon. . . . No fear, but, oh, how very lonely I am—here alone . . . with only that little girl to sob a vain good-bye! . . . The green trees . . . how fair the world is! The grim old Tower. . . . A good day to you, headsman. Be not nervous, for I am not!"

Pilling knelt down on the floor. . . .

There was a sudden thud, as his body fell forward. Hastily I turned on the light. . . .

Pilling lay dead! Across the back of his neck was a livid, red mark, as if made by the headsman's ax. Medically it was a form of "stigmata," due to intense nervous shock.

The Dragon Girl

By EDITH DE GARIS

A Japanese tale about the fiery love of a geisha girl for an Englishman, and the weird apparition that broke into the Dragon Dance

I HAD been on a walking trip through the mountains of Japan and a storm had forced me to take refuge as an overnight guest in a Trappist monastery.

In spite of the warmth from the *hibachi,* the heating-brazier, I found myself shivering, not so much from the chill dampness nor yet the sudden gusts of wind that shook the shutters of the old building as at a vision which had come to me out of the mist. Time after time as a cloud had swept down upon me, my half-brother's face, malignant and terrifying, had stared out at me from behind rock or bush. He was, I knew, on the other side of the world. Had his jealous hatred grown so intense as to become visible to me? Could thoughts become visible?

"What is that you say, sir?"

I looked up startled, not realizing that I had spoken aloud. The man in monk's robe who was setting my supper tray on a low table before me had paused and was gazing at me—strangely, I thought. He was tall and supple and under thirty, but his eyes gave him an almost ancient expression—burning blue eyes which held some secret misery that had bitten into his soul. His chin had a deep cleft in it, his skin was dark with tan and his features held more than a suggestion of the Celt in the upturned nose and lips that should have been ready with a smile but were not. Instead there was a wistful melancholy that spoke of longings unfulfilled. But there was that in his face which lured me on to tell him that which had passed between my half-brother and myself—the usual story of vindictive jealousy — and then of the vision.

When I had finished he stood a moment immobile. Then slowly, very slowly, he said:

"Next week I may take the oath of silence—after that, if I do, I shall not be permitted to speak—it is of God that you came here tonight. . . . I will tell you—you will listen. . . . I thought my own experience unique—I perceive it is not. I will tell you how it happened."

It was as though this man were clutching at me as at a plank before the waters should close over him. Then as the wind wailed and shrieked outside in sudden gusts of madness he threw up his head as though it might have a message for him.

"It was on a night like this that it occurred."

The tumult of the storm deadened his voice and I had to lean across the *hibachi* to hear him. The darkness crept into the room and closed over us like a pool of black water—the light from the two candles failed to dispel it.

"I will begin at the beginning, but it is a long story," he said.

He told of his English father and Irish mother—one of the Dunhavens of Dunhaven Castle—from whom had come a heritage that had cursed him—yes, cursed him—with an insatiable desire for beauty and with conflicting impulses which had caught him as in a net. He told how he had revolted from the commonplace which was England and was ever haunted by the romance of far-off places. Finally he drifted into a position

"She cowered against the tree-trunk."

in a bank, met Margaret, and, as she suggested peace, he became engaged to her. But the realities of his life did not equal the realities of his dreams—he would saturate himself with the charm of an Oriental country; then he would return to England, marry Margaret and settle down. He could do this after he had sown the seeds of his romantic quest and reaped a crop to last him the rest of his life. So he thought—but in any event he must have the experience. At his request the bank transferred him to its Tokyo branch in Japan, and Margaret, understanding, had sent him off with a smile.

Margaret, he called her; he mentioned no other name.

The first month he had lived in one of the Tokyo hotels and had hated it.

"I hated its artificiality, its calculating servants, its constant ferment of tourists," he said.

I nodded—I knew the hotel.

And then a dinner had been given by a Japanese client to the officials of the bank, and Ryu San, the geisha, had danced.

"RYU SAN was not her real name—it was her geisha name—it means Dragon and was bestowed upon her because of her special dance," he explained.

"And how wonderful she was in that Dragon dance! Mysterious and alluring—yes, and repelling also—but mostly alluring. You have seen geisha and you know how lovely some of them are. Well, Ryu San was also called the Pearl. Her eyes had tiny gold flecks in them—queer eyes—the lids curved like a rose

leaf, and they were slightly uptilted. This, as you know, is very rare and is a mark of beauty in the Orient. I have seen only one other Japanese girl with eyes like that, and she was of noble birth."

The man was gazing unseeing at the shadows in the corner.

"Her hair gleamed like black satin and her white oval face——"

His words faltered—he made a banishing gesture—and when he continued he spoke more quickly:

"But it was her smile that fascinated me—that strange half-smile as though she saw things which I did not see—as though she knew hidden sources of charm that would satisfy the pagan passion of my soul.

"Two weeks after that dinner Ryu San and I moved into the Temple House." This remark fell and echoed in the stillness given to the room by a lull in the storm like the soft bounding and rebounding of a rubber ball. He continued:

"The Temple House we called it because it had once been a temple. That was the reason Ryu San had selected it—she knew I would like it because of its associations. And I did—it was one of the things her smile had promised. It had been a temple but not a very prosperous one until one night the *bonze* had a dream in which cries issued from the ground and his robe was plucked by invisible fingers which drew him in his sleep into the garden to a well. I am telling it as he told it. Around him was the darkness of a moonless night, but as he dug, a mist hovered over the hole. This became more and more luminous as he dug until there was revealed a golden image of the goddess Kwannon. For how many centuries had she lain there buried?

"The priest set up this miraculous image on the altar of the temple, and pilgrims came to worship, leaving offerings of money to propitiate her. So the priest was able to build a temple more worthy of the golden Kwannon, and the old temple was made over into a dwelling with Ryu San and me as its first tenants.

"Picture a great rambling temple structure with dark mysterious recesses. This was set in a garden in the middle of which were stepping-stones that wandered past the old mildewed well near which the Kwannon had been found, and then into the graveyard of the temple, which was separated from the garden only by a hedge of low trees which did not really separate but rather joined the garden and graveyard. A heavy fragrance hung over the garden as well as the graveyard from the incense ever burning at the tombs—the homage of the living to their dead. And sometimes a mist would spread as a stain above the graves and would glow there like a golden exhalation of the earth. The Japanese said it was the souls of the dead and would not visit the graveyard when it was visible."

The eyes of the man were fixed and his voice dwindled off into stillness. The walls of the monastery had vanished and there was the old temple and the garden and the graveyard.

He continued in a slow, even voice:

"Ryu San in her green and gold brocaded robe would dance for me—the Dragon Dance; that is, she would on the evenings when I was not writing to Margaret. On the evenings when I wrote to Margaret, Ryu San would watch me for many moments with an expression in her close-lidded eyes that I did not then understand, after which she would go out across the stepping-stones that lay in a half-circle to the bamboo gate and into the graveyard. She would flash a moment

among the stone lanterns and tombstones and then disappear. An hour or so afterward she would return, her kimono edged with drops of dew, and with her came the perfume of incense as if she had bathed in it. But she was as calm as though she had left but to give an order to a servant. I did not ask her where she had been—I did not suspect a lover—I knew she was a one-man woman and the man at that moment happened to be myself. It was only a part of that strangeness which was her attraction—and also there was something—an impenetrable Oriental poise that prevented my questioning her.

"It is strange, but I pledge you my word I felt no disloyalty to Margaret at that time. Ryu San was part of the charm of the world which I was seeking; Margaret would be the companion of my life and I would love her with a fixed love after the stinging hunger for romance within me had been gratified. An instinct beyond reason told me this."

It was the morality of the unashamed pagan.

The man gazed abstractedly at the floor and went on:

"I did not deceive Ryu San—I told her that when I left Japan I would leave her. She made no comment—merely smiled her enigmatic smile that promised all things—or nothing.

"And then one evening I took a picture of Margaret from my trunk, put it in an ivory frame and placed it upon my desk. But I fancied that, framed in ivory, Margaret's face lost its piquant quality, and I decided to have the photograph tinted. I was gazing at it when my nerves began to tingle and I was conscious that some one was in the room, although I had not heard the sliding door open. I turned, and there stood Ryu San, swaying slightly, her leaf-shaped eyelids drawn together. For a moment she became as motionless as a brook that had instantly frozen; then without a word she turned and hurried through the door into the misty graveyard—hurried as though something were drawing her. I watched her go and saw the luminous mist above the graves close around her, and then I thought no more about her."

THE storm had subsided and there was a silence in the room that held echoes of itself. A bird or a bat struck the window and the night shivered with the whirring of its wings. The man continued:

"She returned and I remember how her kimono glistened with the dew and her hair looked alive with vibrant tendrils clinging to her cheeks. Her eyes had a stealthy look, hiding behind the lids like frightened animals.

"I asked her to dance for me—the Dragon Dance—but somehow that night her dance was too realistic—her shadow on the paper *shoji* of the sliding doors too sinuous and writhing, and the sibilant song which accompanied the dance cut the air like hisses. I stopped her and I am not sure but that there was relief in her eyes.

"A week later Margaret's photograph had been tinted and was back in its frame on my desk. She gazed at me so sweetly that I gayly blew a kiss to her as I set forth the next morning for the bank. At the corner of the street I realized that I had left my watch under my pillow and went back for it. The front door was open and I made no noise as I entered the house. The sliding door to my room was also open and I slipped quietly into the room. As I did so, I saw Ryu San glide through the door that led into the garden. I stopped a moment to watch her—her walk always fascinated me—it had the

unconscious grace of a panther—when suddenly I had the sensation of some one —something—being in the room, and I found myself peering into a darkened corner alongside my desk.

"My senses reeled! What was it I saw? And did I see anything but shadows? And yet those shadows seemed to unite into a vapory form which turned features toward me that were a horrible travesty of hate. The lower part of the figure slowly elongated and tapered off and seemed to float toward me. Involuntarily I drew back and as I did so collided with a servant who had entered the room, and when I looked again in the corner there was no vapory form—only ordinary shadows. I picked up my watch and departed for the bank.

"Out again in the sunshine I laughed at myself. A fancy, thought I, a shadow on my brain. And yet at the back of my brain I believed I had seen what I had seen. For days it made me horribly nervous and I spoke to Ryu San about it. She laughed, queerly I thought, and said that such fancies were common with people of my temperament, and recommended a doctor. But I refused to see a doctor and gradually I forgot the apparition in the corner. I did not see it again and decided that I had really been a bit off. Anyhow, all was well now. But I felt that Ryu San was watching me—watching me from under her leaf-shaped eyelids."

In the pause that followed, the man poured a cup of tea and drank it. Then he resumed his tale in quickened words but still passionless as though stating something which bore no relation to himself.

"It happened one evening in early September," he went on. "The day had been one of those hot, humid days that often come in early September—a heat insidious and cloying. I had told Ryu San that I would go to Kamakura that evening and perhaps stay all night—it would be cool there and I could have a swim in the sea. But that afternoon I changed my mind—it was the typhoon season and one was making its way up from Kyushu. I did not wish to be marooned at the seashore in a typhoon, so I had dinner on the hotel roof and started for home.

"All day the heat had spread around and had wrapped my body as in a steaming blanket—it oppressed my limbs with the oppression of some lifeless weight. There was a breathless quality about it that was ominous in its very quiet—something scornful as though it were holding itself in check for the moment and was not sure whether it would let itself loose or not—that was it, a sort of suspense—and the gray dusk unfolding did not disturb it, but only made it the more dreadful.

"There are times when a stormy melancholy day so dominates a sensitive nature that every cell of the brain seems instinct with a premonition of evil that throws a black mantle over the reason. I found myself moving like an automaton enveloped in a dread I neither understood nor could shake off.

"My steps lagged as I approached the house. As I walked up the path through the garden I noticed how like black blots the pine trees looked against the gray sky and how like limbs distorted in pain their branches were in the grip of the wind.

"I realized that I was in a morbid mood and I determined to try and throw it off as soon as I could by reading a novel. But when I entered the room I instantly knew I had no need of a novel. There on the floor, shredded into a hundred pieces as if by the teeth of an in-

furiated animal was a letter to Margaret which I had that morning left on my desk. My blood changed in a moment from sluggish lead to a devastating fire, and a cry of rage broke from me, for I immediately divined that it was Ryu San who had dared to desecrate my letter to Margaret. It was not to be borne—I would find her, drag her into the room and confront her with that devilish litter on the floor. I saw myself in a dramatic pose, pointing to the debris and telling her what I thought about it. And then —well, I thought she would never allow her jealousy to get control of her again.

"Somehow I knew that she had gone to the graveyard, and without thinking about it I started across the garden, my body so tingling with rage that I hardly noticed the gusts of wind that pushed me this way and that way. It was a strange, wild storm—the beginning of a typhoon —and as I passed through the bamboo gate I noticed that above the graves was that unnatural luminous mist that so terrified the Japanese, and it was being tossed about by the wind like a chiffon veil.

"And there beneath the swaying trees in an open strip alongside the hedge I saw the gleam of Ryu San's green and gold kimono flashing like a jade flame in the gray mist.

"I STARTED toward her but was halted in my steps by a most singular spectacle. Ryu San was dancing—she was dancing there in the mist like some mad puppet—the Dragon Dance—twisting and writhing like a creature in pain, and with a gesture of impotent rage plucking at the hedge and casting the branches before her to dance on them. She tore at her kimono so violently that I thought I heard the sound of the rent cloth above the noise of the storm. This may not have been possible—I was in an overwrought condition, but I do know that I heard her laugh—a shrill mocking laugh such as one might expect from a mad devil.

"It was so preposterous and ghastly that I found myself unable to move and I stood there like a stone image staring at the gyrating figure in a dumb amazement. And over and all around us was the tumult of the maddened elements.

"It was intolerable—I could stand it no longer—and I was just forcing myself to move toward her when I noticed that she had crouched down against the trunk of a pine tree and had thrown up her hands as if to ward off some fearful menace.

"And then I saw *it!*

"The vapory form I had seen before in the corner of my room. It hung in the air and tapered off to the ground—a misshapen grotesque thing like a cloud of smoke issuing from the inner fire of the earth. And it had a rare ghost of a face twisted and distorted into a horrible grimace as if fashioned by the hand of a fiend.

"As I watched it with a sick and silent fascination it seemed to float forward to Ryu San. With a low moan she arose to her feet and began to glide toward it in a wild, joyless measure of the Dragon Dance. And for a long breath they confronted each other—the horrible tapering figure and the swaying girl—and then gradually the specter vanished—was sucked back into the grayness that had borne it, but only to reappear as Ryu San stopped her dance—stronger in outline, it seemed to me, and more menacing. And beyond and through the apparition I could see the black shadows of the pine trees, their branches dancing in a devil's dance in the wind.

"Apparently Ryu San did not know I

was there. As for me, I could not move, I could not speak. My feet were rooted in the ground and my tongue was lead in my mouth. Like a statue I watched this incredible duel between the specter and the geisha girl.

"Manifestly her weapon against this terror was the Dragon Dance, and at each advance of the apparition she would rise to her feet and fall into the wildest measures of this dance, whereupon the specter would gradually lessen until it quite disappeared.

"I can not say what chaotic thoughts of helping her went through my mind as I stood there trying to shout or move, or in some way to let Ryu San know that I was there—perhaps none—my white man's code of chivalry had tumbled about my ears in the face of this exotic spectacle.

"Back and forth this went on—for hours, it seemed to me. At each advance of the figure, Ryu San would claw at it with hooked fingers, from which, as I noted with that attention to detail so strangely present at such times, fell tiny drops—was it blood? But this could not go on forever; Ryu San was growing weary and I thought the specter was growing stronger, denser. The pine trees beyond it seemed not so clearly outlined as before—or was the increasing darkness giving it the substance it lacked in the gray twilight?

"I do not know, but I do know that the storm suddenly struck the graveyard with a thunderous force. The branches of the pine trees trembled and shrieked, as they went down beneath the blows; the wind groaned as though being forcibly drawn through the pipes of an unwilling organ which tried to dispel it with discordant violence; the hedge was torn apart and the small saplings were uprooted and tossed hither and thither like leaves. The terrible promise of that awful day was fulfilled. The typhoon was upon us.

"The girl, as though spurred on to increased fury by the storm and plucking strength from its violence, began to dance more and more wildly, darting back and forth and from side to side, and then with both hands she tore at her hair, drawing out the pins and combs until the wind caught it and flung its oiled coils out in a frenzy. And the thought came to me that it resembled nothing so much as a dragon's head I had seen picturing a fable. She had never done that in her Dragon Dance for me, and I found myself thinking how horribly realistic it made the dance. An incredible thought under the circumstances, but then the circumstances were incredible. For the moment I had forgotten the apparition in the awful fascination of Ryu San's dance, and when my eyes were drawn to it, it had changed. Long sinuous tentacles were issuing from its body and feeling out toward the posturing girl. And through the harsh noises of the typhoon, the breaking limbs of trees, the wailing wind, the thuds of falling tombstones, ran a thin sound of sibilant hisses like a scarlet thread in a black fabric.

"And then suddenly the storm ceased. As though spent with its own fury it crumpled to nothing, and the clouds were parted by the moon, which hung between them looking like a ghastly grinning skull. With the ceasing of the storm, Ryu San collapsed. She cowered against the tree trunk and did not rise again. The specter with inconceivable rapidity changed—it took on the character of a dragon from whose snarling mouth darted a tenuous tongue which licked the mist, and hisses cut the now quiet air like sword thrusts.

"It was then that I found my voice. I shouted, I made futile gestures of going

to her. For one instant Ryu San took her eyes off the specter and glanced at me, and again there was that laugh—that horrible mocking laugh.

"And then with one snarling hiss the dragon form was upon her. It coiled tentacle after tentacle around her—her neck, her waist, her knees, her arms. She threw them off one by one only to be held by another which darted out of the dragon's body. She fought it with her hands, her feet; she bit at it, but the hideous fiery tongue licked her face; its fangs dug into her cheeks; its eyes darted their flame at her—and yet she laughed—the laugh of death.

"Man, that went on without end, it seemed to me, while I stood helpless, my blood turned to icy water that made me shiver and shake so that I remember hearing my teeth chatter. My tongue filled my dry mouth and my eyes burned with a hundred hot needles. But again I was powerless—my limbs were lead and could not be moved.

"Eternity it seemed and yet was probably only minutes when suddenly Ryu San seemed to yield to that diabolical embrace and sank like a dying flower unresisting to the ground, and the dragon that had coiled itself around her disappeared—drawn into her quiet body, and I no longer heard that awful mad laugh.

"Then and then only did the power of movement come to me. I rushed forward and lifted Ryu San in my arms. But I laid her down again—gently—she was dead!

"She was dead!" the man repeated. Then he stretched out his arms and raised his head.

"What was it?" I asked in a shuddering whisper.

"I do not know," replied the man. "Perhaps Ryu San's jealousy was brought to such a peak of strength that it was visible in horrible shape even to me—the dragon shape most natural to her thought. Or perhaps my own imagination fashioned the specter out of the mist in which she in her insane jealousy was dancing. I do not know. I only know that Ryu San was dead—that *was* reality."

The man raised his troubled eyes to mine. He must have seen the question there for he added:

"You may wonder why I did not return then to Margaret. I could not—I tried but could not. And as I am a Catholic I came here for peace."

He arose, and some of the trouble left his face as though the grim outline of his experience was softened by some thought, and I could see this thought sail along before the wind of his hope as he said:

"Two years have passed . . . I have expiated the crime—if crime it was—have I not? I do not know . . . it rests with Margaret. If I have, she will come on the *Suwa Maru* next week, and with her I shall forget." And then the shadows settled again in his eyes as he added:

"If she does not . . . I shall remain here—a Trappist monk . . . in silence . . . and *try* to forget."

Then he drew together the folds of his coarse brown robe and left the room.

When next I saw him I was in the port city on the Street of a Thousand Merchants, and out of a motley crowd two people came toward me—a tall, fair girl with eyes as soft and brown as a moth's wing, and a man, tall, supple, under thirty, with blue eyes that blazed with happiness and a deep cleft in his chin. He did not see me—his eyes were fixed on the upturned face of the girl. It was no time for greetings. I passed on.

THE RING

By J. M. FRY

It was only a finger-ring from Old Egypt, but it carried death to the one who wore it

I LOOKED up. The man who had interrupted my gastronomic enjoyment was a tall individual, a little stooped, with a face as long as the prohibitionists' in the cartoons. He had dark hollow places under his eyes. He might have been a Canova statue for all his expression, but his features displayed deep lines as if life had given him more to worry about than most.

"You are——?" he said, and mentioned my name.

I told him I was. I arose and accepted his card. Arvid Hedon. It stirred a faint recollection.

"Have a chair?"

"Thank you," he murmured. I didn't invite him to such close intimacy, but he drew the chair from the opposite side of the table and sat down at the corner next my elbow. He didn't seem to want the people seated nearest us to hear whatever he was going to say.

He leaned over to me and spoke in low tones.

"I take it you're interested in antiques," he said.

I told him I wasn't.

"But," he insisted, "you bought a rare ring at the Felbinger auction not two hours ago."

I told him I had. "What about it?"

"Well——" He hesitated, studying the table-cloth. Then he apparently changed his mind and switched off on a new line.

"Will you sell it to me?" he inquired.

I reminded him that I had just bought it.

"I'll give you any amount you ask; a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thou——"

I said no, feeling very stubborn.

"But think!" he kept on. "It isn't worth very much—a thousand dollars is a big price for it and I'm offering you a fortune!"

"No," I said, "I won't sell it." I told him I already had more money than was good for me but that I had never had such an unusual ring. I told him that I always had a weakness for unusual rings and now that I had one I was going to keep it.

He hung his head for a moment. When he looked at me again the pockets under his eyes seemed to have grown a shade darker. He caught hold of my arm.

"Listen," he said. "I feel—or rather I *know* it's my duty to warn you. If you persist in wearing that"—he tapped the ring on my finger—"you die within twenty-four hours!"

I looked at him in astonishment. "You mean to threaten?"

"No, no! You misunderstand me. I mean that the ring is fatal—it brings death to whoever wears it."

I laughed. "Then to frighten——"

"Don't be a fool!"

"That's what I'm trying not to be," I said a little hotly.

"Oh—bother!" he expostulated. "See here. You've heard of such things before——"

"Of course," I cut in. "Simply myths or coincidences."

He spread his hands deploringly. "That's just it; that's why I hesitated

about telling you this. It isn't the characteristic of educated people to be superstitious. Too bad!"

"I think it's common sense. Have a cigar?"

"No, thanks. Listen! Do you remember the Arvid Hedon Archeological Expedition that made several discoveries in the lower Nile valley a few years ago?"

I thought back and told him I guessed I did.

"Well, I led that party—it bore my name. We made some remarkable findings, among them the tomb of a noble in the court of Rameses II. In his sarcophagus we found that ring. . . . That ring, yes sir! It's over three thousand years old! Look at it."

I was looking at it. Three thousand years old! Well, well. I shouldn't have thought it and told him as much.

"No, I don't suppose you would've," he remarked a little dryly. Then he paradoxically added, "It's never been worn very much—although plenty have worn it."

It made me curious. "How's that?" I asked.

"Well-l . . . I'll tell you," he said. "The ring caught my eye, and I—just kept it. That's a confession. I should have turned it over to the British Museum, which supervised the expedition, but its curious design and the little history I found concerning it made it valuable as a keepsake. So I kept it.

"Perhaps I ought to tell you that history. It was written in the ancient sacred hieroglyphics—on a papyrus roll I found in the sarcophagus. It wasn't long, though most ironic. This man had wished to do away with his twin brother, so he made the ring and had a curse put on it by the High Priest of Ammon-Re. But then he wanted to make sure it would fit his twin brother's finger when he gave it to him, so he tried it on himself. As he did so a bolt struck him down from the clear sky—from Ammon, the sun, as the history stated.

"Of course I put no stock in this story. It was too fantastic, too mythical; I was a skeptic as you are.

"I brought the ring home with me. I never wore it because it was too small, but I gave it to my sister——"

He stopped to wipe a tear from the corner of his eye.

"She wanted it," he continued, "so I gave it to her, and—that same afternoon I looked upon her dead body. She had been run down when crossing the street."

THERE was another pause while he threw back his stooped shoulders as if to strengthen himself; then, seeming to sag a little more in his chair, he went on:

"I had the ring again in my possession. I couldn't bear to see it every day—it sent chills over me—so I hid it away in a secret drawer in my desk.

"My brother wanted it and I refused to give it to him. How he ever got it I don't know, because on the morning of that fatal day I had looked in the drawer to make sure it was still there. I think he must have seen me do that. He was a cocky young devil and only laughed at what he called my 'whim' in keeping it hidden.

"He was a zealous yachtsman—on this day an adverse wind switched his boom around and tossed him overboard, and when we dragged his body from the Thames almost the first thing I noticed was this ring on his finger.

"They laid him on one of the docks and worked on him with a pulmotor for over an hour. It was no use. In my frenzy I forgot about the ring. When later I came to look for it, it was gone.

There had been quite a crowd around and someone must have stolen it.

"I spent days after that, searching every pawnshop in London. I finally found one in Whitechapel where they had bought such a ring, but had sold it again.

"I kept my eyes on the daily papers. I investigated every violent death I found chronicled. Oh, the weary, nerve-racking chase that ring has given me! I have done some marvelous pieces of detective work. It has led me all over Europe, and I've found in its wake only death—violent deaths ranging from accidents to suicides and murders!

"Man, listen to me! Only once since it was stolen off my dead brother's finger have I got as close to it as I am now. That was at Lavenue's, in Paris. A young artist was wearing it. I tried to warn him as I am warning you—but he was very rude, would not listen. He had me ejected from the place. I waited for him and when he came out I tried to collar him again. He avoided me, ran for a moving cab. He slipped and fell under the wheels. They rushed him away before I could crowd through the jam to get near him.

"It wasn't until the next day that I managed to find out where he lived. I arrived there in time to learn that his relatives had sold the ring to help pay his funeral expenses.

"You can imagine that it has eluded me many times. There have been months when I have lost all trace of it, only to pick up a clue from some tragedy that came to my notice.

"I was in Ostend when I got a hint that it had preceded me to New York. I arrived here only yesterday and frantically renewed my search. This afternoon an article in the paper caught my attention; it mentioned that a certain Felbinger had fallen from his bedroom window and become impaled on a spike fence that ran close to his house. It also stated that his heirs were selling off his goods at auction.

"I followed what you would call my hunch and went down there—only to find that I was too late. You were ahead of me.

"I got your name, and your address at the Devereux Club. There they told me that you were probably dining here—so here I am."

He leaned closer to me and grasped my arm again.

"Oh, I ask you, I beseech you, not to wear that ring. Carry it in your pocket, hide it away, but don't wear it! I know what I'm talking about. It has driven me almost mad. I was the means of giving it to the world and it's up to me to get rid of it again. If you are wise you'll destroy it—or if you don't wish to do that, sell it to me for any price you want and destroy it. I won't toss it in the sea or hide it, but I'll grind it to powder and cast it to the wind—utterly destroy it!"

I casually blew a smoke ring and watched its vortical action. I thanked him for his consideration in warning me. I told him that if I decided to destroy the ring I would give him the satisfaction of doing it; and in the meantime I would be very careful.

He sighed heavily and arose. "Yes," he said, "I should like to have that satisfaction. I've certainly earned it! You have my transient address. Good-bye."

He was gone, then, and presently I followed.

It was dark and cold outside. A drizzle was coming down, freezing as it hit the pavement. It was so slippery one could hardly walk.

I hailed a taxi and directed it to the

Devereux Club. As I settled back in my seat I held up my hand to look at the ring by the passing lights. It was certainly curious; I didn't doubt but that Hedin's tale was simply the fabrication of an ingenious brain and that he had become a little cracked over his Egyptian exploits and the story about the ring which he had read. At least I believed the explanation would run somewhere along that line.

I can't tell you just how it happened. I had been engrossed in my thoughts when suddenly I was aware of the tire chains grinding on the ice, then the sensation of spinning in a tub.

Instantly Arvid Hedin's warning flashed into my mind. I grasped hold of the door-handle and hung on in a panic. I think that was what saved my life, for otherwise when the crash came I should surely have been thrown to the opposite side of the taxi—and that side was battered in by a street-light standard.

There were plenty of helping hands to extricate me from the wreckage. I waited there a moment to see if I was needed, but the driver wasn't hurt, and after shaking my clothes into shape and recovering my hat, I proceeded to negotiate my way on foot.

I hadn't gone far when I was passing a skyscraper that was being erected—they work on these buildings day and night. I heard a deafening crash overhead and ducked out into the street just as a load of bricks broke through some faulty scaffolding and landed upon the sidewalk.

I skated back to the curb in time to miss narrowly being struck by an oncoming car.

You may suppose that my faith in our practical beliefs was just a little shaken by this time; and can you blame me for what I did? Even if you do not blame me, I blush to admit it. I took the ring off my finger and dropped it in my pocket.

I felt somewhat safer as I walked on.

But in another block I was calling myself names for my superstitious cowardice. Was I to be frightened by a man's freakish fancy and a few narrow squeaks that seemed to corroborate it? Of course I wasn't! I was simply making a fool of myself in doubting Plato's philosophy.

I pulled the ring out of my pocket and jammed it on my finger.

Just then a car sped by, followed closely by another with siren going full blast. I heard the barking of automatics and instinctively ducked. It was lucky that I did, for a stray bullet bored a neat hole through the crown of my hat.

With jaws tightly set, I hurried my pace. The Devereux Club was just ahead of me, and within its portals I knew I should be safe. Nothing ever happened there.

Now to me the Devereux Club was an institution embodying all the comforts a respectable loafer could wish for. Its old-fashioned architecture appealed to me and in spite of its exclusive atmosphere it was very home-like. It was there that I kept my bachelor quarters.

I heaved a great sigh of relief as the doorman let me in. It was my haven—I felt like a mariner just getting into port after a stormy voyage. Safety was all around me. I stood for a moment in the foyer intoxicated with it, glorying in it, drinking in the homely reek of tobacco smoke with deep breaths and listening to the loving kisses of the billiard balls.

Never shall I forget what a wonderful sense of freedom and security I had at that moment. It was an elixir for the most fatalistic constitution. I was thrilled to the marrow.

With my head held high I buoyantly

took a step, tripped over a Persian rug and sprawled headlong.

My foot struck the jamb of a knight's suit of armor standing inside the door. A halberd was loosened from the mailed fist, and I rolled out of the way as it cut a gash in the floor where my neck had been.

I scrambled to my feet. I think that I was very red of face, and I know that I was swearing. I coarsely told the porter who rushed to my assistance that he'd better see that such menaces to life and property were banished from the Devereux Club. "Y-yes, sah," he said, he would. I told him that knights never carried such things anyway, so a halberd was particularly incongruous with that suit of armor.

I brushed past him and made for the stairs. I hesitated only long enough to remove the ring from my finger, figuring that the plaster might fall off the ceiling.

HAS someone said that one's bedroom is one's fortress? It was in mine that at last I was able to breathe air untainted with mystery and danger; for, I ask you, what could ever happen to me now? Nothing—absolutely nothing! I locked the door and sat down in my lounge chair to think matters over in a rational mood.

I drew the ring from my pocket. Now that I was safe from all harm my thoughts had dropped into a more tranquil groove and the idea that a mere ring, however curiously wrought and old, could bear a fatal curse again struck me as being beyond reason. A ring bring death? Absurd! It was inconsistent with common sense. It was all right for the ancient people of darkest Egypt, but not today.

I laughed aloud.

Besides, a new and pleasant suspicion dawned upon me. Perhaps after all the ring was a good-luck charm! Of course, that was it. Why hadn't I thought of that before? Just look at the close calls I had had—and here I was alive and uninjured!

I joyously slipped it on my finger. I recalled that our civilization sometimes permitted us to believe in good-luck charms, for such a superstition is not nearly so bad as a belief in curses.

I twisted it round and round on my finger, reveling in the sensation of protection its influence ensured me.

I read for perhaps an hour; then, feeling a little drowsy after my eventful evening, I repaired early to bed.

Thinking seems to be more adapted to a reclining position and a darkened room. It was now that I began to attribute a psychological significance to my misadventures—a significance based on suggestion. Arvid Hedon had given me the suggestion; in spite of myself it had leaked into my subconscious mind, and though my conscious mind had not believed, my subconscious had. It was a logical hypothesis, as any psychologist will tell you. I had simply unwittingly led myself into danger through Arvid Hedon's deep-planted suggestion.

Strange, it hadn't occurred to me before.

Then I thought that perhaps I had not yet meditated sufficiently on the suggestion of good luck to implant it on my subconscious mind, and to inhibit the evil suggestion that had been or was already there. This brought a cold sweat upon my brow. I decided to use Coué's formula to pierce the subconscious at the moment of lapsing into sleep.

But what if I shouldn't succeed? It's so much easier to believe in bad luck than in good!

My imagination began to prove annoy-

ing. I thought of a dozen things that might happen, the likeliest of these being the possibility of a meteorite dropping through the roof. But, pshaw! Imagination is the stuff that cowards are made of.

I rolled over and concentrated on sleep.

My window rattled. I leaped out of bed. It was only the wind; but what if there should be a cyclone? There are precedents even in New York.

I quickly tore the ring from my finger and laid it on my dresser; and the next day I gave Arvid Hedon the satisfaction of destroying it.

Was I foolish? Possibly I was—but let me finish before you judge too harshly.

I said the Devereux Club was an old-fashioned affair; it still clung to combination chandeliers even in the bedrooms. As I turned back from the dresser I smelled a familiar, pungent odor. I instantly turned on the lights and investigated. How it happened, I don't know.

The gas jet was turned on.

A Queen in Other Skies

By DONALD WANDREI

Her queer, ensorcelled eyes
  Are like the secret pools of Jupiter,
    Concealed with opalescent mist whose fall
And rise
  Is as the fall and rise of mist of myrrh.

So deeply dark and fair
  Behind the amber lids they dimly dream,
    Imbedded witches' jewels mystical,
Whose rare
  And violet depths with flameful passions gleam.

Her eyes of eidotrope,
  Mysterious as her sunken palace is,
    Are languorous with dreams of mighty doom,
And ope
  To ponder old, unsated malices.

Discoverlessly far,
  She rules a realm decayed from elder days,
    An empress regnant in an empty tomb—
A star
  Beyond the black beyond the stellar maze.

ABDUCTOR MINIMI DIGIT

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

A peculiar little story about a man who learned how to move his left little toe by will-power

CHARLES DEANE'S death occurred so many years ago that I feel that it is now safe to publish what I know about it.

As it happens, I was a member of the coroner's jury who sat on the case, the jury who decided, for the sake of the peace of mind of Deane's widow, to suppress Deane's diary, which was among the evidence collected by the coroner. That diary has remained in my possession ever since; and, now that Mrs. Deane has died too, I feel that there can be no harm in giving certain extracts from it to the public.

All matters of an intimate or personal nature will be omitted; in fact, everything except that which throws some light on the causes of Charles Deane's death.

The diary follows:

SEPT. 3. To Doctor Foster today, for him to look at my sore throat. While waiting my turn in the anteroom, I studied an anatomical chart on the wall. Such charts always fascinate me. It was one of those colored charts, which show the way a person would look if his skin could be painlessly removed. All sorts of funny names tacked onto parts of the body, parts which I never suspected existed. The longest and most high-sounding names tacked onto the smallest and least important parts. For example, a tiny muscle and tendon running along the outside edge of the foot was called "Abductor Minimi Digit." Fancy that!

Doctor Foster happened to step out into the anteroom, and saw me looking at the chart.

"Interested?" he asked, with an amused smile on his lips.

"Yes," I replied. Then, "Say, Doc, what's that funny little muscle with the long name?"

"The abductor minimi digit? There should be an 'i' on the end of it, but it's usually abbreviated the way it's given on the chart. Translate its name into English, and you have: 'the puller-away of the littlest digit.' A more modern name for it is 'abductor digiti quinti,' meaning 'the puller-away of the fifth digit.' It's to move the little toe out sidewise from the others."

"But nobody can do that!" I laughed, trying to do it inside my shoe.

"Some can, and some can't," said he, "but the muscle is there, in all of us."

Then he led me into his office, and looked at my throat, which is what I had come for.

Sept. 4. Last night, as I was undressing to go to bed, I got to wondering about that little thread of red muscle which is supposed to lie along the outside edge of my foot. "Abductor minimi digit" it is called.

I tried to wiggle my little toe with it, but the toe never budged. I might just as well have tried to wiggle one of the handles on one of the bureau drawers by just looking at it. My toe seemed

strangely not a part of me, like the drawer-handles.

Got to thinking about that alleged toe-muscle. Made up my mind to try it for a few minutes every evening. Try to wiggle that blame toe!

Sept. 5. Last night, I tried to wiggle my little toe. My *right* little toe, to be more specific. I watched that toe, fascinated. Put every bit of my will-power into the effort to move it. Made passes at it with my hands, as though to hypnotize it. But it stared back at me, and stubbornly refused to move.

Sept. 20. Every night, for over two weeks I have practised on that abductor minimi digit muscle, but still my toe refuses to move. However, I believe that I am gaining on it, for the toe now feels as though it were coming under my control. I can sense some psychic connection between that toe and my nerve system; I can sense the little thread of red muscle. And I can *almost* make that toe respond to my will.

Sept. 21. Last night, just the faintest flicker of that toe. It's mine! I control it! My abductor minimi digit has become a thing of reality. Now, if the toe will only move!

Sept. 22. Last night the toe moved! Actually moved! But the effort exhausted me; and I could not make the toe move a second time.

Sept. 23. Last night the toe moved again, several times. This is a silly pursuit of mine, giving so much time and attention to the development of a perfectly useless muscle, a muscle which has atrophied through long generations of disuse. And yet there is considerable of a thrill to feel that you have control over something which formerly was hardly a part of you. No one who hasn't tried it can ever realize what a satisfaction there is to adding a new muscle to one's repertory.

It is like reaching out and annexing something which formerly was not a part of one.

Oct. 1. The toe-exercises have progressed. My right abductor minimi digit is developing, strengthening. I can now move my little toe smartly away from the others at will, just as easily as I can spread apart the fingers of either hand.

Last night, after putting my right little toe through his paces, I tried it on my left. But he never budged. I wonder if I have any abductor minimi digit in my left foot. My left little toe seems not to be a part of me. I must reach out and annex some more of the universe.

Oct. 15. Last night I was able to move my *left* little toe. This is a most intriguing game!

Oct. 20. This evening I am seated in my study. I have taken off both shoes, and have been putting my two trained toes through their paces. They both function perfectly. Both are under complete control.

And now, like Alexander, I am looking for new worlds to conquer, but unfortunately I don't know the names of any more freak muscles. I must go down to Doctor Foster's tomorrow and look up some more names on his anatomical chart.

No! I have a better idea. It has suddenly come to me. The paperweight there on the desk. I will try and move *it*. True, it is not a part of me, like my toes; and yet, less than two months ago, my toes seemed just as far from being a part of me, just as remote from any possibility of control by my will, as that paperweight does now.

Why not look hard at that paperweight, and force it to move, by the sheer power of my will? Absurd? Of course, it's absurd! But it seemed equally absurd with respect to my toes, and yet I

finally made *them* move. So I shall try it with the paperweight.

Oct. 21. It is evening again. I am in my study. I can wiggle my toes, but not the paperweight. But at least I can try! I shall concentrate my will on the paperweight, and see what happens.

Oct. 26. For a week, every evening, I have tried to move that paperweight, by just looking at it and straining my will-power toward it; yet still it sits motionless upon the desk.

However, I believe that I am gaining on it, for I can almost feel the paperweight coming under my control. I can sense some psychic connection between that paperweight and my nerve system, though there is no little thread of red muscle, no abductor minimi digit here.

Oct. 27. I can *almost* make that paperweight respond to my will! I am elated!

Oct. 28. Aha! Just now I saw just the faintest flicker of that paperweight! Or did I imagine it? Perhaps it was merely the reflection of the firelight.

I tried again, but nothing happened.

Oct. 29. I could hardly wait for evening to come. Now it is here, and I am alone in the study, with my toes and that paperweight. That accursed paperweight!

The paperweight seems to be becoming a part of me. Or perhaps I am becoming a part of it. Anyhow, it obsesses me. I *must* make it move. I must!

How hot it is in here! I take off my coat. The blood pounds at my temples! Let me be calm. I am on the verge of a great discovery, a great accomplishment; and such an occasion demands calmness.

Careful now. Let me put all my calm sane effort into moving that paperweight.

I pause exhausted, but I think it did move—just the slightest shudder. I must rest, and try again.

Now I am calm. Calmer than ever before in my whole life. And with that calmness, there comes a realization of what I am trying to do. If my will-power can move that paperweight, the accomplishment will represent the beginning of the triumph of mind over matter. To what heights of destiny may I not then aspire?

Thoroughly rested now, I am. I stare across the desk at that paperweight. Once it obsessed me, but now I am its master. All that I have to do is stretch out my will, and it will move for me. I am sure of this. I can take my time now and set down these thoughts on the eve of my great triumph. For I *know* that I can move that paperweight whenever I wish.

My personality seems to stand aloof, and look down on the whole scene: Charles Deane, Esquire, sitting at his desk, calm, serene, supreme, the first man in the world to be able to move an inanimate object by mere will-power, without touching it.

And yet, in that aloof spectatorship, I can not help realizing that such things are not done. That they are contrary to the natural order, which God has ordained.

I am afraid! But it is too late to stop now. Oh, the fascinating horror of being able to move that paperweight!

Enough of this scribbling. I must put my power to the test, although I know that if that accursed weight actually moves, I shall go stark, staring insane.

Well, here goes.

* * * * * * *

These were the last words of Charles Deane's diary. He was found dead at his desk, a look of horror on his face, his pen and diary lying in front of him, and one hand reached forward and grasping a heavy carved paperweight.

MIVE

By CARL JACOBI

Giant butterflies on Carling's Marsh brought terror to the lone man who explored it

CARLING'S MARSH, some called it, but more often it was known by the name of Mive. Strange name that—Mive. And it was a strange place. Five wild, desolate miles of thick water, green masses of some kind of kelp, and violent vegetable growth. To the east the cypress trees swelled more into prominence, and this district was vaguely designated by the villagers as the Flan. Again a strange name, and again I offer no explanation. A sense of depression, of isolation perhaps, which threatened to crush any buoyancy of feeling possessed by the most hardened traveler, seemed to emanate from this lonely wasteland. Was it any wonder that its observers always told of seeing it at night, before a storm, or in the spent afternoon of a dark and frowning day? And even if they had wandered upon it, say on a bright morning in June, the impression probably would have been the same, for the sun glittering upon the surface of the olive water would have lost its exuberant brilliance and become absorbed in the roily depths below. However, the presence of this huge marsh would have interested no one, had not the east road skirted for a dismal quarter-mile its melancholy shore.

The east road, avoided, being frequently impassable because of high water, was a roundabout connection between the little towns of Twellen and Lamarr. The road seemed to have been irresistibly drawn toward the Mive, for it cut a huge half-moon across the country for seemingly no reason at all. But this arc led through a wilderness of an entirely different aspect from the land surrounding the other trails. Like the rest it started among the hills, climbed the hills, and rambled down the hills, but after passing Echo Lake, that lowering tarn locked in a deep ravine, it straggled up a last hillock and swept down upon a large flat. And as one proceeded, the flat steadily sank lower; it forgot the hills, and the ground, already damp, became sodden and quivering under the feet.

And then looming up almost suddenly —Mive! . . . a morass at first, a mere bog, then a jungle of growth repulsive in its over-luxuriance, and finally a sea of kelp, an inland Sargasso.

Just why I had chosen the east road for a long walk into the country I don't really know. In fact, my reason for taking such a hike at all was rather vague. The day was certainly anything but ideal; a raw wind whipping in from the south, and a leaden sky typical of early September lent anything but an inviting aspect to those rolling Rentharpian hills. But walk I did, starting out briskly as the inexperienced all do, and gradually slowing down until four o'clock found me plodding almost mechanically along the flat. I dare say every passer-by, no matter how many times he frequented the road, always stopped at exactly the same spot I did and suffered the same feeling of awe and depression that came upon me as my eyes fell upon that wild marsh. But instead of hurrying on, instead of quickening my steps in search of the hills again, I for some unaccountable reason which I have always laid to curiosity, left the trail and plunged through oozing fungi to the water's very edge.

A wave of warm humid air, heavy with the odor of growth, swept over me as though I had suddenly opened the door of some monstrous hothouse. Great masses of vines with fat creeping tendrils hung from the cypress trees. Razor-edged reeds, marsh grass, long waving cat-tails, swamp vegetation of a thousand kinds flourished here with luxuriant abundance. I went on along the shore; the water lapped steadily the sodden earth at my feet, oily-looking water, grim-looking, reflecting a sullen and overcast sky.

There was something fascinating in it all, and while I am not one of those adventurous souls who revel in the unusual, I gave no thought of turning back to the road, but plodded through the soggy, clinging soil, and over rotting logs as though hurrying toward some destination. The very contrast, the voluptuousness of all the growth seemed some mighty lure, and I came to a halt only when gasping for breath from exertion.

For perhaps half an hour I stumbled forward at intervals, and then from the increasing number of cypress trees I saw that I was approaching that district known as the Flan. A large lagoon lay here, stagnant, dark, and entangled among the rip-grass and reeds, reeds that rasped against each other in a dry, unpleasant manner like some sleeper constantly clearing his throat.

All the while I had been wondering over the absolute absence of all animate life. With its dank air, its dark appeal, and its wildness, the Eden recesses of the Mive presented a glorious place for all forms of swamp life. And yet not a snake, not a toad, nor an insect had I seen. It was rather strange, and I looked curiously about me as I walked.

And then . . . and then as if in contradiction to my thoughts it fluttered before me.

With a gasp of amazement I found myself staring at an enormous, a gigantic ebony-black butterfly. Its jet coloring was magnificent, its proportions startling, for from wing tip to wing tip it measured fully fifteen inches. It approached me slowly, and as it did I saw that I was wrong in my classification. It was not a butterfly; neither was it a moth; nor did it seem to belong to the order of the *Lepidoptera* at all. As large as a bird, its great body came into prominence over the wings, disclosing a huge proboscis, ugly and repulsive.

I suppose it was instinctively that I stretched out my hand to catch the thing as it suddenly drew nearer. My fingers closed over it, but with a frightened whir it tore away, darted high in the air, and fluttered proudly into the undergrowth. An exclamation of disappointment burst from me, and I glanced ruefully at my hand where the prize should have been.

It was then that I became aware that the first two fingers and a part of my palm were lightly coated with a powdery substance that had rubbed off the delicate membrane of the insect's wings. The perspiration of my hand was fast changing this powder into a sticky bluish substance, and I noticed that this gave off a delightfully sweet odor. The odor grew heavier; it changed to a perfume, an incense, luring, exotic, fascinating. It seemed to fill the air, to crowd my lungs, to create an irresistible desire to taste it. I sat down on a log; I tried to fight it off, but like a blanket it enveloped me, tearing down my resistance in a great attraction as magnet to steel. Like a sword it seared its way into my nostrils, and the desire became maddening, irresistible.

At length I could stand it no longer, and I slowly brought my fingers to my lips. A horribly bitter taste which momentarily paralyzed my entire mouth and

throat was the result. It ended in a long coughing spell.

DISGUSTED at my lack of will-power and at this rather foolish episode, I turned and began to retrace my steps toward the road. A feeling of nausea and of sluggishness began to seep into me, and I quickened my pace to get away from the stifling air. But at the same time I kept watch for a reappearance of that strange butterfly. No sound now save the washing of the heavy water against the reeds and the sucking noise of my steps.

I had gone farther than I realized, and I cursed the foolish whim that had sent me here. As for the butterfly—whom could I make believe the truth of its size or even of its existence? I had nothing for proof, and . . . I stopped suddenly!

A peculiar formation of vines had attracted my attention—and yet not vines either. The thing was oval, about five feet in length, and appeared to be many weavings or coils of some kind of hemp. It lay fastened securely in a lower crotch of a cypress. One end was open, and the whole thing was a grayish color like a cocoon . . . a cocoon! An instinctive shudder of horror swept over me as the meaning of my thoughts struck me with full force.

With a cocoon as large as this, the size of the butterfly would be enormous. In a flash I saw the reason for the absence of all other life in the Mive. These butterflies, developed as they were to such proportions, had evolved into some strange order and become carnivorous. The fifteen-inch butterfly which had so startled me before faded into insignificance in the presence of this cocoon.

I seized a huge stick for defense and hurried on toward the road. A low muttering of thunder from somewhere off to the west added to my discomfort. Black threatening clouds, harbingers of an oncoming storm, were racing in from the horizon, and my spirits fell even lower with the deepening gloom. The gloom blurred into a darkness, and I picked my way forward along the shore with more and more difficulty. Suddenly the mutterings stopped, and there came that expectant, sultry silence that precedes the breaking of a storm.

But no storm came. The clouds all moved slowly, lava-like toward a central formation directly above me, and there they stopped, became utterly motionless, engraved upon the sky. There was something ominous about that monstrous cloud bank, and in spite of the growing feeling of nausea, I watched it pass through a series of strange color metamorphoses, from a black to a greenish black, and from a decided green to a yellow, and from a yellow to a blinding, glaring red.

And then as I looked those clouds gradually opened; a ray of peculiar colorless light pierced through as the aperture enlarged disclosing an enormous vault-shaped cavern cut through the stratus. The whole vision seemed to move nearer, to change from an indistinguishable blur as though magnified a thousand times. And then towers, domes, streets, and walls took form, and these coagulated into a city painted stereoscopically in the sky. I forgot everything and lost myself in a weird panorama of impossible happenings above me.

Crowds, mobs, millions of men clothed in mediæval armor of chain mail with high helmets were hurrying on, racing past in an endless procession of confusion. Regiment upon regiment, men and more men, a turbulent sea of marching humanity were fleeing, retreating as if from some horrible enemy!

And then it came, a swarm, a horde of butterflies . . . enormous, ebony-black, carnivorous butterflies, approaching a

doomed city. They met—the men and that strange form of life. But the defensive army and the gilded city seemed to be swallowed up, to be dissolved under this terrible force of incalculable power. The entire scene began to disintegrate into a mass, a river of molten gray, swirling and revolving like a wheel—a wheel with a hub, a flaming, fantastic, colossal ball of effulgence.

I was mad! My eyes were mad! I screamed in horror, but like Cyprola turned to stone, stood staring at this blasphemy in the heavens.

Again it began to coalesce; again a picture took form, but this time a design, gigantic, magnificent. And there under tremendous proportions with its black wings outspread was the butterfly I had sought to catch. The whole sky was covered by its massive form, a mighty repulsive tapestry.

It disappeared! The thunder mutterings, which had become silenced before, now burst forth without warning in unrestrained simultaneous fury. The clouds suddenly raced back again, erasing outline and detail, devouring the sight, and there was only the blackness, the gloom of a brooding, overcast sky.

With a wild cry, I turned and ran, plunged through the underbrush, my sole thought being to escape from this insane marsh. Vines and creepers lashed at my face as I tore on; knife reeds and swamp grass penetrated my clothing, leaving stinging burns of pain. Streak lightning of blinding brilliance, thunderations like some volcanic upheaval belched forth from the sky. A wind sprang up, and the reeds and long grasses undulated before it like a thousand writhing serpents. The sullen water of the Mive was black now and racing in toward the shore in huge waves, and the thunder above swelled into one stupendous crescendo.

Suddenly I threw myself flat upon the oozing ground and with wild fear wormed my way deep into the undergrowth. It was coming!

A moment later with a loud flapping the giant butterfly raced out of the storm toward me. Scarcely ten feet away I could see its enormous, sword-like proboscis, its repulsive, disgusting body, and I could hear its sucking inhalations of breath. A wave of horror seared its way through my very brain; the pulsations of my heart throbbed at my temples and at my throat, and I continued to stare helplessly at it. *A thing of evil it was, transnormal, bred in a leprous, feverish swamp, a hybrid growth from a paludinous place of rot and over-luxuriant vegetation.*

But I was well hidden in the reeds. The monstrosity passed on unseeing. In a flash I was up and lunging on again. The crashing reverberations of the storm seemed to pound against me as if trying to hold me back. A hundred times I thought I heard that terrible flapping of wings behind me, only to discover with a prayer of thanks that I was mistaken. But at last the road! Without stopping, without slackening speed, I tore on, away from the Mive, across the quivering flat, and on and on to the hills. I climbed; I stumbled; I ran; my sole thought was to go as far as possible. At length exhaustion swept over me, and I fell gasping to the ground.

It seemed hours that I lay there, motionless, unheeding the driving rain on my back, and yet fully conscious. My brain was wild now. It pawed over the terrible events that had crowded themselves into the past few hours, repictured them, and strove for an answer.

What had happened to me? What had happened to me? And then suddenly I gave an exclamation. I remembered now, fool that I was. The fifteen-inch butterfly

which had so startled me near the district of the Flan . . . I had tried to catch the thing, and it had escaped, leaving in my hand only a powderish substance that I had vainly fought off and at last brought to my lips. That was it. What had happened after that? A feeling of nausea had set in, a great inward sickness like the immediate effects of a powerful drug. A strange insect of an unknown order, a thing resembling and yet differing from all forms of the *Lepidoptera,* a butterfly and yet not a butterfly. . . . Who knows what internal effect that powder would have on one? Had I been wandering in a delirium, a delirium caused by the tasting of that powder from the insect's wings? And if so, where did the delirium fade into reality? The vision in the sky . . . a vagary of a poisoned brain perhaps, but the monstrosity which had pursued me and the telltale cocoon . . . again the delirium? No, and again no! That was too real, too horrible, and yet everything was all so strange and fantastic.

But what master insect was this that could play with a man's brain at will? What drug, what unknown opiate existed in the membrane of its ebony-black wings?

And I looked back, confused, bewildered, expecting perhaps an answer. There it lay, far below me, vague and indistinct in the deepening gloom, the black outlines of the cypress trees writhing in the night wind, silent, brooding, mysterious—the Mive.

The Silver Knife

By RALPH ALLEN LANG

A shivery tale of Wolf Dahlgren and his gruesome adventure with a great wolf that trailed him through the arctic wastes

WHEN Ross Nagel returned in less than a fortnight from his first man-hunt in the uniform of a Northwest Mounted policeman it was a matter of surprize to all who witnessed his return to barracks. It was not that any one doubted his ability, for he came to the Mounties with an enviable service record in His Majesty's troops in the Far East. The surprize was due to the fact that he had been assigned to the trail of Wolf Dahlgren, a veritable wolf of the North, whose familiar ground constituted no less than a thousand square miles of frozen waste.

Still more surprized was the post commander when Nagel, in making his report, laid before him a package containing two curious articles.

The first of these was well calculated to inspire the astonishment with which the Inspector regarded it. It was a knife of falchion shape, with a wicked curve at the point that suggested the purpose for which it had originally been made: a sacrificial knife. In the eyes of the Inspector this impression was further confirmed by the material of which it was made: beaten silver; and by the pair of great twin rubies that ornamented the hilt. He had once seen a knife almost exactly similar to it while attached as guard to an expedition excavating the ruins of an ancient temple of Dagon. But what could such a knife, with its priceless inset gems, be doing here in the arctic wastes of North America? Only one explanation presented itself to the puzzled mind of

the Inspector; that it had been brought by an immigrating Old World tribe in some dim period of history when the continents were still connected by a strip of land. A remnant of this tribe might conceivably still exist in the unexplored regions of the north, the sacred knife having been handed down from generation to generation. How had Wolf Dahlgren gained possession of it while under pursuit by the Mounties on a murder charge? He turned his attention to the other article on the desk, a small leather-bound notebook, in hopes that it might furnish an explanation. It was in good condition except for blood stains on the cover, legibly written, and the Inspector leaned back to read. The first entry was dated two weeks previously:

Dec. 3rd.

With this entry I begin another diary, one of a long series, written to be destroyed, that have solaced the loneliness of three years spent on arctic trails. It is lonely here in camp tonight, with the nearest white settlement two hundred miles away, and a hard day's trailing from the native village where I passed the last week. If luck stays with me this will be my last trek through this bitter, accursed country, and luck at last is coming my way. After three years of freezing, starving, and murdering miserable creatures for contemptible amounts, luck puts me in possession of a treasure more valuable than any gold mine in the North. The simple Indian fools who used the silver knife in their sacrificial service could have no idea of the value of the great rubies in its hilt. To them it is merely a religious relic handed down from long-forgotten ancestors; to me it is freedom, life, luxury, the silver key of desire. It is right and just that I should have the knife, who have so much better use for it than any the old sachem ever put it to. They will not have missed it until twilight tonight, and no Indians will cover as much trail in two days as the one I have left behind me today. In less than two weeks I will hit the sea-coast; then for a ship to the States, and the Mounties can have their North.

Dec. 4th.

Another good day's trailing, bettering perhaps the distance made yesterday. Nothing of interest has occurred and I have seen no living thing except a skulking timber wolf. It is remarkable in that it is the largest I have ever seen, a great shaggy brute standing inches higher than any of my huskies, and it seems to be following me. Doubtless it is beginning to feel the pinch of winter hunger.

Dec. 5th.

An astounding thing occurred last night, unparalleled in all of my experience in the North; an attack by a wolf or wolves on a camp protected by an open fire. It was well after midnight and, due to the fact that I was sleeping more soundly than usual, the fire had subsided almost into a bed of coals when I was jarred awake by a sharp yelp from the dogs, followed by the snarling fury of a fight. It could not be called a fight, either, for the wolf or wolves were gone again into the night as swiftly as they had come, and I had only a brief glimpse of one shaggy giant as he faded into the obscurity of the darkness. But brief as the engagement was, its effect was devastating to my team; the lead-dog having been literally torn to ribbons and another slashed on the shoulder. As a consequence I was able to make but poor time today and I had trouble constantly with the dogs, so demoralized is their condition. What puzzles me is that the attackers seemed to make no effort to obtain food, but I suppose that my awakening frightened them away. I have seen the lone

wolf several times today, dogging my trail at an uncomfortably close distance. On one occasion I was close enough to see his devilish fangs as he stood and snarled his hatred. Two clear shots I had at him before he retreated and I am unable to explain how I could have missed him. I have seen no other wolves at any time and am almost forced to believe that it was he alone who made the attack last night, although it seems impossible that one wolf could wreak such havoc. Tonight I will keep a sharp watch to prevent a repetition of it.

Dec. 6th.

The wolf was back last night and despite all of my precautions took toll of another of my dogs. I was sleeping lightly with my rifle at the ready and was up at the first sound, getting my first close sight of him as he raised his bloody fangs from the husky's throat and turned to face me. He must have stood nearly three feet high, but it was the ghoulish fury in his yellow eyes that unnerved me more than his great stature. I fired point-blank at the hideous head, but still he stood there fixing me with that baleful glare, and it was not until the pack closed in on his flank that he turned and loped away. Three dogs only are left of my original five, and these are so demoralized with terror that I can make but poor headway. I, too, own myself a victim of intense nervousness, and am weighted down by an uncanny, unreasonable feeling of dread. If I were more susceptible to superstitious beliefs I might find myself imagining all sorts of weird explanations of my failure to drop him at point-blank with a rifle that has brought down moose. As it is, though I take no stock in werewolf tales, my mental condition is such that I would not be above trying a silver bullet on him if I had one, merely to relieve my nerves.

Dec. 7th.

The Thing was back again last night, but this time he appeared in a different manner. He is bold now, and appeared as soon as dusk had fallen, skulking in the shadows just outside the circle of firelight. Three hours I sat there under the spell of those hellish yellow eyes, now appearing on one side of the circle, now on the other, compelling me frequently to change my position in order to watch him. I fired again and again with no result except that the eyes moved to another position. Then it happened. Before I knew what had occurred I was pouring shot after shot into the charging beast, until the hammer clicked on an empty chamber. He was so close that the hateful eyes seemed burning through my brain, and in desperate agony I grasped the only weapon my hand fell upon, the silver knife. What happened then I do not clearly know, but he swerved away from me and in some unexplainable way I sensed fear in his snarl. Then he was among the dogs, ripping and slashing, and a third victim was torn to ribbons. My nerve is shattered and I scarcely know what to believe. Bullets have no effect on the Thing and I am here in the wilderness a hundred miles from civilization with no protection against him. I have one hope, founded on the manner in which he avoided me last night. For some reason he fears me, although I am absolutely helpless before him. My only hope now is to push on to the coast with the two dogs I have left, praying that these, too, may not fall victims before I reach there.

Dec. 8th.

I am writing this now not to dispel loneliness or even nervousness, but in sheer terror, and to take my mind off the horror that is prowling outside. It may be the last page of this ghastly tale, for the Thing has grown desperate now and ap-

parently has submerged its fear of me in the greater fear of my reaching civilization and escaping it. Since early morning I have pushed forward at a killing pace, with the Thing growing steadily in confidence or in desperation and drawing closer to me with every mile. At noon I reached this abandoned miner's cabin and was able to gain its shelter in just the nick of time. The Thing evidently can think, for at sight of the cabin it threw all caution to the winds and charged, straining me to the utmost to reach the door, and forcing me to abandon the dogs. Their cries were pitiful, for so greatly had the terror grown upon them that they did not even try to fight. Watching from a small high window on the north side of the cabin I was sickened at the savage rending of their bodies and at the ghastly aspect of its bloody snout as it raised its head and gave vent to a blood-chilling howl, the first sound I have heard it utter. I can not describe the nightmare of horror that closed down on my brain as it rang through the silence and which has left me completely unmanned. It was minutes before I could pull myself together enough to make a search of the cabin for any means of defense, and then at last luck smiled and gave me a glimmer of hope. Among a collection of useless odds and ends left by the miners I found an old bullet-mold, and the thought has come to me that I may be able to melt enough silver from the knife to run a bullet. Weird and ridiculous as the idea seems, I am convinced that the thing outside can be nothing else than a werewolf, and my only hope is to try a silver bullet, to which alone they are said to be vulnerable. I have pried all of the loose wood obtainable off of the studding and wait now for the fire to burn into coals hot enough to melt the silver. It is almost ready and I stop now to break a piece from the guard of the knife.

All hope of killing the Thing is now gone. The wood I have is too dry and lifeless to make a fire hot enough to melt the silver. I must play a waiting game now, for as long as the provisions in my shoulder knapsack hold out I am safe. In its wolf form the Thing can not open the door, although I have no way of barring it, and if it assumes human shape I will kill it with a bullet. It is whining now, and scratching against the wall in an effort to rear up high enough to look in the window. . . . Now it is padding back and forth, back and forth, before the door; trying, doubtless, to work up courage to assume its human form and—there, now, is a hand on the latch!

It has been three minutes now since the latch was raised. Fear is doubtless holding him back. At any moment he may conquer it, but I am ready. Hounds of Hell! can it be possible that he is changing back into a wolf again? . . .

* * * * * * *

THERE was a strange look on Inspector Moore's face as he raised his eyes in a questioning glance to the face of the constable, who still waited.

"Just how did you come into possession of these?" he asked.

Nagle's face showed plainly that he too had perused the contents of the diary.

"I found them in an abandoned miner's cabin beyond Bitter Creek," he answered slowly. "Wolf Dahlgren was in there dead, his throat torn as though by the fangs of a wolf. I found this diary on the table beside him. There was another corpse in there too, a wrinkled old Indian whose weird ceremonial garb marked him as some kind of medicine man or sachem. It was in his breast that I found the silver knife."

THE ORDEAL OF WOODEN-FACE

By HAL K. WELLS

His dead eyes came to life when he saw the young American stagger into the bungalow like a specter out of the past

MACDONALD forgot the smothering heat of the jungle night as he watched the miracle that was taking place there in his bungalow. For the dead eyes of Wooden-Face Jones were coming to life!

The young American had come staggering into MacDonald's clearing nine months ago, a nameless derelict with a nameless past. He could not have been over thirty, yet his ravaged, set face was that of a very old man, and his eyes were the terrible lusterless eyes of a dead man walking in the night.

He remained on at the bungalow as an assistant to the lonely Scotch naturalist. MacDonald gave him the name of Jones. The blacks of the district added the descriptive sobriquet of Wooden-Face.

Through the months the somber veil in the eyes of Wooden-Face Jones had never once lifted. But tonight, as Anson Borger's thick voice rasped on, the veil in the derelict's eyes was swiftly lifting, and the light which blazed in their depths was one that made even MacDonald's case-hardened nerves tingle.

Borger, an official of a New York ivory firm, had been MacDonald's guest since morning. He was a flabby hulk of a man, with cold little pig-eyes set in a heavy-jowled, whisky-reddened face. Hours of steady drinking in an effort to deaden the soggy torture of the heat had finally loosened his tongue until all reserve was now cast aside in a maudlin boasting of his past exploits.

"This young Garland had a fine job back in New York, a fine girl, and all that," Borger was relating contemptuously, "but why should I have had any squeamish scruples on that account? Why, we'd never even seen each other. I had the chance to use him for a stepping-stone and I took it. Garland got out of the United States just one jump ahead of the law. I got his job, and now I'm sitting pretty. I've never heard of Garland since. The young sap probably killed himself."

"No, he didn't kill himself, Borger," Wooden-Face Jones broke in softly. The light in the derelict's smoldering eyes was now a blood-red flame of hate. "Garland fled to Africa. He's still here. Borger—I'm Garland!"

The ruddy color drained swiftly from Borger's beefy face, leaving it oddly mottled. He gazed in terrified fascination at the revolver that was now in Wooden-Face's hand.

"By using me for a stepping-stone, Borger," Wooden-Face continued softly, "you mean that you juggled my books while I was on that Western trip out of the office. Strange that I didn't guess it before—but I see it all now. The remedy is obvious. If you should happen to fail to return to New York, with what I now know I can go back and clear myself."

The muzzle of the revolver rose until it pointed directly at Borger's forehead. Borger was too sick with cold fear to even plead for mercy. For a long, tense minute Wooden-Face Jones' finger tightened slowly upon the trigger.

Then, with a cry that was half a sob, Wooden-Face abruptly lowered the weapon.

"I can't do it!" he groaned. "Not that way! If I'd kill you without giving you at least a chance for your life, I'd always be seeing that damned flabby face of yours in my dreams!"

Wooden-Face's eyes roved restlessly around the room as though seeking inspiration. Then he noted the array of bottles on a sideboard over against the wall. He smiled grimly.

He tossed the revolver over to MacDonald. "Keep that swine covered, Mac, while my back is turned."

Wooden-Face walked over to the sideboard. "Borger, we'll go back to the Middle Ages to solve our little problem. You remember their old custom of trial by ordeal? There are cyanide salts in that jar. There is port wine in this bottle. I'll turn my back to you and hide these two glasses as I mix our drinks. In one of them, I'll put cyanide. Then I'll let you choose which one you will drink. I will drink the other. One of us will go back to New York—and life. Do you agree?"

Borger's nod of assent was a little too eager, MacDonald thought. Then he saw the reason. In a mirror on the end wall Borger was watching Wooden-Face's hidden hands as he prepared the drinks. One of the glasses was of green glass, the other white. It should be easy for Borger to identify the one into which the cyanide went.

Wooden-Face seemed to take an unnecessarily long time to mix the drinks. MacDonald wondered if the derelict might not have noticed the mirror also, and be deliberately tricking Borger. He knew that Wooden-Face had phenomenally clever fingers. He often amused the blacks with his sleight-of-hand.

When Wooden-Face turned there was a warning look in his eyes that silenced any thought of protest that MacDonald had. Borger's face was confident as he selected the green glass.

"We'll drink at the same moment," Wooden-Face ordered. "The salty taste of the cyanide will immediately warn the loser, so we will drain our glasses at a single gulp."

The two men lifted their glasses in a mocking suggestion of a toast—then drank.

Borger strangled, then scrambled wildly to his feet, tearing at his collar. His eyes were fixed upon Wooden-Face with a terrible questioning. Wooden-Face merely smiled quietly as he set his empty glass down.

Borger's face purpled hideously, and he fell heavily to the floor. MacDonald bent over him for a minute. "Dead," he announced crisply. "He got the cyanide glass after all, in spite of the mirror."

Wooden-Face smiled gently. "There was no cyanide, Mac. I put nothing but a spoonful of common table-salt in each glass. He tasted the salty tang, and saw that I was apparently unscathed. His own imagination, and that booze-soaked heart of his, did the rest."

The Wolf-Leader*

By ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The Story Thus Far

THIBAULT, a French shoemaker, lived alone in a forest near Villers-Cotteret on the estate of the Baron of Vez. A good-looking man in his late twenties, Thibault had seen just enough of the world to make him discontented with his own station in life.

The Baron of Vez was an ardent huntsman. Following a stag one day, his dog pack lost the scent near Thibault's hut. Thibault sought to obtain the stag for himself, by poaching, but was found out, and escaped a severe whipping only by the intervention of a girl, Agnelette. The girl told Thibault quite frankly, after the Baron's party departed, that she wished to marry, and Thibault engaged himself to her.

But Thibault's rancor against the Baron was so great that he was willing to go to any length to get even with him. He had carelessly called upon the Devil to give the stag to him, and to his astonishment he found the stag tied inside his hut when he went home that night.

But the stag was a mild surprize in contrast to Thibault's second visitor, a huge black wolf that appeared in the hut in a very mysterious way. When the shoemaker raised a hatchet with an idea of killing the wolf, he was dumfounded to hear the beast speak. The strange creature gave Thibault to understand that the Devil was of a mind to bargain and would grant the man's desires in return for hairs from his head, one for the first wish, two for the second, four for the third and so on, doubling the number for every wish granted. The wolf then gave Thibault a ring in exchange for one the shoemaker was wearing, and the unholy pact was complete.

Thibault's ambition fired by the black wolf's promises, the shoemaker determined to forget Agnelette and marry Madame Polet, the wealthy young widow who owned the mill at Croyolles. But he found that Madame Polet was enamored of another, and in his rage he behaved so badly that she ordered the servants to put him out. Thibault escaped up a steep hillside where the servants could not follow. "What can we do against a werewolf?" they asked their mistress.

Going home through the forest, Thibault was alarmed when a pack of wolves surrounded him, but he soon discovered

*This remarkable werewolf novel, by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, is not included in the published collections of Dumas' works in English, and will therefore be new to our readers, except those who have had the good fortune to read the story in the original French.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for August

that they were friendly. That night and subsequent nights they formed a guard around his hut, even hunting for deer and bringing him venison to eat.

One lock of Thibault's hair was now entirely red, but his envy of the nobility made him resolve to use his satanic power to the utmost, even if all his hair should be claimed by the Devil's color.

Returning from one of his escapades, guarded by his wolves, Thibault catches sight of a wedding procession, and sees his lost love, Agnelette, arm in arm with Engoulevent, one of the retainers of the Baron of Vez. They proceed to the village church and are married, while Thibault, with rage in his heart, goes to an inn to forget his jealous sorrow in drink.

CHAPTER 15

The Lord of Vauparfond

THIBAULT, on arriving at the *Dauphin d'Or,* ordered himself as fine a dinner as he could think of. He wished the other drinkers to envy him his three different wines, drunk out of three different-shaped glasses. He wished everybody to hear him give his orders in a haughty voice, to hear the ring of his money.

As he gave his first order, a man in a gray coat, seated in the darkest corner of the room with a half-bottle of wine before him, turned round, as if recognizing a voice he knew. And, as it turned out, this was one of Thibault's tavern acquaintances. On seeing that it was Thibault, the other man turned his face away quickly, but not so quickly but that Thibault had time to recognize Auguste François Levasseur, valet to Raoul the Lord of Vauparfond.

"Halloa! François!" Thibault called out, "what are you doing sitting there in the corner, and sulking like a monk in Lent, instead of taking your dinner openly and cheerfully as I am doing, in full view of everybody?"

François made no reply to this interrogation, but signed to Thibault to hold his tongue.

"I am not to speak? not to speak?" said Thibault. "And supposing it does not suit me to hold my tongue, supposing I wish to talk, and that I am bored at having to dine alone, and that it pleases me to say; 'Friend François, come here; I invite you to dine with me'? You will not? no? very well, then I shall come and fetch you." And Thibault rose from his seat, and followed by all eyes, went up to his friend and gave him a slap on the shoulder vigorous enough to dislocate it.

"Pretend that you have made a mistake, Thibault, or you will lose me my place; do you not see that I am not in livery, but am only wearing my drab greatcoat? I am here as proxy in a love affair for my master, and I am waiting for a letter from a lady to carry back to him."

"That's another matter altogether, and I understand now and am sorry for my indiscretion. I should like, however, to have dined in your company."

"Well, nothing is easier; order your dinner to be served in a separate room, and I will give word to our host, that if another man dressed in gray like me comes in, he is to show him upstairs; he and I are old cronies, and understand one another."

"Good," said Thibault; and he therewith ordered his dinner to be taken up to a room on the first floor, which looked out upon the street.

François seated himself so as to be able to see the person he was expecting, while some distance off, as he came down the hill of Ferté-Milon. The dinner which Thibault had ordered was quite sufficient for the two; all that he did was to send for another bottle or so of wine. Thibault

had only taken two lessons from Maître Magloire, but he had been an apt pupil; moreover Thibault had something which he wished to forget, and he counted on the wine to accomplish this for him. It was good fortune, he felt, to have met a friend with whom he could talk; for, in the state of mind and heart in which he was, talking was as good a help toward oblivion as drinking. Accordingly, he was no sooner seated, and the door shut, and his hat stuck well down on to his head so that François might not notice the change in the color of his hair, than he burst at once into conversation, boldly taking the bull by the horns.

"And now, friend François," he said, "you are going to explain to me some of your words which I did not quite understand."

"I am not surprized at that," replied François, leaning back in his chair with an air of conceited impertinence; "we attendants on fashionable lords learn to speak court language, which every one of course does not understand."

"Perhaps not, but if you explain it to your friends, they may possibly understand."

"Quite so! ask what you like and I will answer."

"I look to your doing so the more, that I will undertake to supply you with what will help to loosen your tongue. First, let me ask, why do you call yourself a *gray-coat?* I thought *gray-coat* another name for a jackass."

"Jackass yourself, friend Thibault," said François, laughing at the shoemaker's ignorance. "No, a *gray-coat* is a liveried servant, who puts on a gray overall to hide his livery, while he stands sentinel behind a pillar, or mounts guard inside a doorway."

"So you mean that at this moment then, my good François, you are on sentry go? And who is coming to relieve you?"

"Champagne, who is in the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert's service."

"I see; I understand exactly. Your master, the Lord of Vauparfond, is in love with the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert, and you are now awaiting a letter which Champagne is to bring from the lady."

"*Optimé!* as the tutor to Monsieur Raoul's young brother says."

"My Lord Raoul is a lucky fellow!"

"Yes, indeed," said François, drawing himself up.

"And what a beautiful creature the Countess is!"

"You know her then?"

"I have seen her out hunting with his Highness the Duke of Orleans and Madame de Montesson. To the health of my Lord Raoul!"

As François put down his glass on the table, he uttered an exclamation; he had that moment caught sight of Champagne.

They threw open the window and called to this third comer, and Champagne, with all the ready intuition of the well-bred servant, understood at once, and went upstairs. He was dressed, like François, in a long gray coat, and had brought a letter with him.

"Well," asked François, as he caught sight of the letter in his hand, "and is there to be a meeting tonight?"

"Yes," answered Champagne, with evident delight.

"That's all right," said François cheerfully.

Thibault was surprized at these expressions of apparent sympathy on the part of the servants with their master's happiness.

"Is it your master's good luck that you are so pleased about?" he asked of François.

"Oh, dear me, no!" replied the latter, "but when my master is engaged, I am at liberty!"

"And do you make use of your liberty?"

"One may be a valet, and yet have one's own share of good luck, and also know how to spend the time more or less profitably," answered François, bridling as he spoke.

"And you, Champagne?"

"Oh, I," replied the last comer, holding his wine up to the light, "yes, I, too, hope to make good use of it."

"Well, then, here's to all your love affairs! since everybody seems to have one or more on hand," said Thibault.

"The same to yours!" replied the two other men in chorus.

"As to myself," said the shoemaker, a look of hatred to his fellow creatures passing over his face, "I am the only person who loves nobody, and whom nobody loves."

His companions looked at him with a certain surprized curiosity.

"Ah! ah!" said François, "is the report that is whispered abroad about you in the countryside a true tale then?"

"Report about me?"

"Yes, about you," put in Champagne.

"Oh, then they say the same thing about me at Mont-Gobert as they do at Vauparfond?"

Champagne nodded his head.

"Well, and what is it they do say?"

"That you are a werewolf," said François.

Thibault laughed aloud. "Tell me, now, have I a tail?" he said, "have I a wolf's claws? have I a wolf's snout?"

"We only repeat what other people say," rejoined Champagne; "we do not say that it is so."

"Well, anyhow, you must acknowledge," said Thibault, "that werewolves have excellent wine."

"By my faith, yes!" exclaimed both the valets.

"To the health of the devil who provides it, gentlemen."

The two men who were holding their glasses in their hand, put both glasses down on the table.

"What is that for?" asked Thibault.

"You must find some one else to drink that health with you," said François; "I won't, that's flat!"

"Nor I," added Champagne.

"Well and good, then! I will drink all three glasses myself," and he immediately proceeded to do so.

"Friend Thibault," said the Baron's valet, "it is time we separated."

"So soon?" said Thibault.

"My master is awaiting me, and no doubt with some impatience . . . the letter, Champagne?"

"Here it is."

"Let us take farewell then of your friend Thibault, and be off to our business and our pleasures, and leave him to his pleasures and business." And so saying, François winked at his friend, who responded with a similar sign of understanding between them.

"We must not separate," said Thibault, "without drinking a stirrup-cup together."

"But not in those glasses," said François, pointing to the three from which Thibault had drunk to the enemy of mankind.

"You are very particular, gentlemen; better call the sacristan and have them washed in holy water."

"Not quite that, but rather than refuse the polite invitation of a friend, we will call for the waiter, and have fresh glasses brought."

"These three, then," said Thibault, who was beginning to feel the effects of the wine he had drunk, "are fit for nothing more than to be thrown out the window? To the devil with you!" he ex-

claimed as he took up one of them and sent it flying. As the glass went through the air it left a track of light behind it, which blazed and went out like a flash of lightning. Thibault took up the two remaining glasses and threw them in turn, and each time the same thing happened, but the third flash was followed by a loud peal of thunder.

THIBAULT shut the window, and was thinking, as he turned to his seat again, how he should explain this strange occurrence to his companions; but his two companions had disappeared.

"Cowards!" he muttered. Then he looked for a glass, but found none left.

"Hum! that's awkward," he said. "I must drink out of the bottle, that's all!"

And suiting the action to the word, Thibault finished up his dinner by draining the bottle, which did not help to steady his brain, already somewhat shaky.

At nine o'clock, Thibault called the innkeeper, paid his account, and departed.

He was in an angry disposition of enmity against all the world; the thoughts from which he had hoped to escape possessed him more and more. Agnelette was being taken farther and farther from him as the time went by; every one, wife or mistress, had some one to love them. This day, which had been one of hatred and despair to him, had been full of the promise of joy and happiness for everybody else; the lord of Vauparfond, the two wretched valets, François and Champagne, each of them had a bright star of hope to follow; while he, he alone, went stumbling along in the darkness. Decidedly there was a curse upon him. "But," he went on thinking to himself, "if so, the pleasures of the damned belong to me, and I have a right a claim them."

As these thoughts went surging through his brain, as he walked along cursing aloud, shaking his fist at the sky, he was on the way to his hut and had nearly reached it, when he heard a horse coming up behind him at a gallop.

"Ah!" said Thibault, "here comes the Lord of Vauparfond, hastening to the meeting with his love. I should laugh, my fine Sir Raoul, if my Lord of Mont-Gobert managed just to catch you! You would not get off quite so easily as if it were Maître Magloire; there would be swords out, and blows given and received!"

Thus engaged in thinking what would happen if the Comte de Mont-Gobert were to surprize his rival, Thibault, who was walking in the road, evidently did not get out of the way quickly enough, for the horseman, seeing a peasant of some kind barring his passage, brought his whip down upon him in a violent blow, calling out at the same time: "Get out of the way, you beggar, if you don't wish to be trampled under the horse's feet!"

Thibault, still half drunk, was conscious of a crowd of mingled sensations, of the lashing of the whip, the collision with the horse, and the rolling through cold water and mud, while the horseman passed on.

He rose to his knees, furious with anger, and shaking his fist at the retreating figure:

"Would the devil," he exclaimed, "I might just for once have my turn at being one of you great lords, might just for twenty-four hours take your place, Monsieur Raoul de Vauparfond, instead of being only Thibault, the shoemaker, so that I might know what it was to have a fine horse to ride, instead of tramping on foot; might be able to whip the peasants I met on the road, and have the opportunity of paying court to these beautiful women, who deceive their husbands as the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert does!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when the Baron's horse shied, throwing the rider over its head.

CHAPTER 16

My Lady's Lady

THIBAULT was delighted at seeing what had happened to the young Baron, whose hand, anything but light, had so shortly before made use of his whip on Thibault's shoulders, which still smarted with the blow. The latter now ran at full speed to see how far Monsieur Raoul de Vauparfond was injured; he found a body lying insensible, stretched across the road, with the horse standing and snorting beside it.

But Thibault could hardly believe his senses on perceiving that the figure lying in the road was not the same as had, but five minutes previously, ridden past him and given him the lash with the whip. In the first place, this figure was not in the dress of a gentleman, but clothed like a peasant, and, what was more, the clothes he had on seemed to Thibault to be the same as he himself had been wearing only a moment before. His surprize increased more and more and amounted almost to stupefaction on further recognizing, in the inert, unconscious figure, not only his own clothes, but his own face. His astonishment naturally led him to turn his eyes from this second Thibault to his own person, when he became aware that an equally remarkable change had come over his costume. Instead of shoes and gaiters, his legs were now encased in an elegant pair of hunting-boots, reaching to the knee, as soft and smooth as a pair of silk stockings, with a roll over the instep, and finished off with a pair of fine silver spurs. The knee-breeches were no longer of corduroy, but of the most beautiful buckskin, fastened with little gold buckles. His long coarse olive-colored coat was replaced by a handsome green hunting-coat, with gold lace facings, thrown open to display a waistcoat of fine white jean, while over the artistically pleated shirt hung the soft wavy folds of a cambric cravat. Not a single article of dress about him but had been transformed, even to his old lantern-shaped hat, which was now a three-cornered one, trimmed with gold lace to match the coat. The stick also, such as workmen carry partly for walking and partly for self-defense, and which he had been holding in his hand a minute before, had now given place to a light whip, with which he gave a cut through the air, listening with a sense of aristocratic pleasure to the whistling sound it made. And finally, his slender figure was drawn in at the waist by a belt, from which hung a hunting-knife, half sword, half dagger.

Thibault was pleased beyond measure at finding himself clothed in such a delightful costume, and with a feeling of vanity, natural under the circumstances, he was overcome with the desire to ascertain without delay how the dress suited his face. But where could he go to look at himself, out there in the midst of pitch darkness? Then, looking about him, he saw that he was only a stone's throw from his own hut.

"Ah! to be sure!" he said, "nothing easier, for I have my glass there."

And he made haste toward his hut, intending, like Narcissus, to enjoy his own beauty in peace and all to himself. But the door of the hut was locked, and Thibault felt vainly for the key. All he could find in his pockets was a well-filled purse, a sweetmeat box containing scented lozenges, and a little mother-of-pearl and gold penknife. What could he have done then with his doot-key? Then suddenly a bright thought occurred to him—possibly

the key was in the pocket of that other Thibault who was lying out there in the road.

He went back and felt in the breeches pocket, where he discovered the key at once, in company with a few sous. Holding the rough clumsy thing in the tips of his fingers, he returned to open the door. The inside of the hut was even darker than the night outside, and Thibault gropped about to find the steel, the tinder and flint, and the matches, and then proceeded to try and light the candle, which consisted of an end stuck into an empty bottle. In a second or two this was accomplished, but in the course of the operation Thibault was obliged to take hold of the candle with his fingers.

"Pah!" he said, "what pigs these peasants are! I wonder how they *can* live in this dirty sort of way!"

However, the candle was alight, which was the chief matter, and Thibault now took down his mirror, and bringing it to the light, looked at himself in it. His eye had no sooner caught sight of the reflected image, than he uttered a cry of astonishment; it was no longer himself that he saw, or rather, although it was still Thibault in spirit, it was no longer Thibault in body. His spirit had entered into the body of a handsome young man of twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, with blue eyes, pink fresh cheeks, red lips, and white teeth; in short, it had entered into the body of the Baron Raoul de Vauparfond. Then Thibault recalled the wish that he had uttered in his moment of anger after the blow from the whip and his collision with the horse. His wish had been that for four and twenty hours he might be the Baron de Vauparfond, and the Baron de Vauparfond be Thibault, which now explained to him what had at first seemed inexplicable, why the unconscious man now lying in the road was dressed in his clothes and had his face.

"But I must not forget one thing," he said; "that is, that although I seem to be here, I am not really here, but lying out there, so I must be careful to see that during the twenty-four hours, during which I shall be imprudent enough to be away from myself, no irreparable harm comes to me. Come now, Monsieur de Vauparfond, do not be so fastidious; carry the poor man in, and lay him gently on his bed here." And, although with his aristocratic instincts Monsieur de Vauparfond found the task very repugnant to him, Thibault, nevertheless, courageously took up his own body in his arms and carried himself from the road to the bed. Having thus placed the body in safety, he blew out the light, for fear that any harm should come to this other self before he came to; then, carefully locking the door, he hid the key in the hollow of a tree, where he was in the habit of leaving it when not wishing to take it with him.

The next thing to do was to get hold of the horse's bridle and mount into the saddle. Once there, Thibault had a preliminary moment of some uneasiness, for, having travelled more on foot than on horseback, he was not an accomplished rider, and he naturally feared that he might not be able to keep his seat when the horse began to move. But it seemed that, while inheriting Raoul's body, he also inherited his physical qualities; for the horse, being an intelligent beast, and perfectly conscious of the momentary want of assurance on the part of his rider, made an effort to throw him, whereupon Thibault instinctively gathered up the reins, pressed his knees against the horse's side, dug his spurs into them and gave the animal two or three cuts of the whip, which brought it to order on the spot.

Thibault, perfectly unknown to him-

self, was a past master in horsemanship. This little affair with the horse enabled Thibault more fully to realize his duality. As far as the body was concerned, he was the Baron Raoul de Vauparfond from top to toe; but as far as the spirit was concerned, he was still Thibault. It was, therefore, certain that the spirit of the young lord who had lent him his body was now sleeping in the form of the unconscious Thibault which he had left behind in the hut.

The division of substance and spirit between himself and the Baron, however, left him with a very vague idea of what he was going, or would have, to do. That he was going to Mont-Gobert in answer to the Countess's letter, so much he knew. But what was in the letter? At what hour was he expected? How was he to gain admission to the Castle? Not one of these questions could he answer, and it only remained for him to discover what to do, step by step, as he proceeded. Suddenly it flashed across him that probably the Countess's letter was somewhere on his person.

He felt about his dress, and, sure enough, inside the side pocket of his coat was something, which by its shape, seemed to be the article he wanted. He stopped his horse, and putting his hand into his pocket, drew out a little scented leather case lined with white satin. In one side of the case were several letters, in the other only one; no doubt the latter would tell him what he wanted to know, if he could once get to read it.

He was now only a short distance from the village of Fleury, and he galloped on, hoping that he might find a house still lighted up. But villagers go to bed early, in those days even earlier than they do now, and Thibault went from one end of the street to the other without seeing a single light. At last, thinking he heard some kind of movement in the stables of an inn, he called. A stable-boy sallied out with a lantern, and Thibault, forgetting for the moment that he was a lord, said: "Friend, could you show me a light for a moment? You would be doing me a service."

"And that's what you go and call a chap out of bed for?"—answered the stable-boy rudely. "Well, you are a nice sort of young 'un, you are!" And turning his back on Thibault he was just going to re-enter the stable, when Thibault, perceiving that he had gone on a wrong tack, now raised his voice, calling out:

"Look here, sirrah, bring your lantern here and give me a light, or I'll lay my whip across your back!"

"Ah! pardon, my lord!" said the stable-boy. "I did not see who it was I was speaking to." And he immediately stood on tiptoe holding the lantern up as Thibault directed him.

Thibault unfolded the letter and read:

"My Dear Raoul,

"The goddess Venus has certainly taken us under her protection. A grand hunt of some kind is to take place tomorrow out in the direction of Thury; I know no particulars about it, all I do know is, that *he* is going away this evening. You, therefore, start at nine o'clock, so as to be here at half-past ten. Come in by the way you know; some one whom you know will be awaiting you, and will bring you, you know where. Last time you came I didn't mean to upbraid you, but it did seem to me you stayed a long time in the corridors.

"Jane."

"Devil take it!" muttered Thibault.

"I beg your pardon, my lord?" said the stable-boy.

"Nothing, you lout, except that I do not require you any longer and you can go."

"A good journey to you, my lord!" said the stable-boy, bowing to the ground, and he went back to his stable.

"Devil take it!" repeated Thibault, "the letter gives me precious little infor-

mation, except that we are under the protection of the Goddess Venus, that *he* goes away this evening, that the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert expects me at half-past ten, and that her Christian name is Jane. As for the rest, I am to go in by *the way I know.* I shall be awaited by *some one I know,* and taken *where I know.*"

Thibault scratched his ear, which is what everybody does, in every country of the world, when plunged into awkward circumstances. He longed to go and wake up the Lord of Vauparfond's spirit, which was just now sleeping in Thibault's body on Thibault's bed; but, apart from the loss of time which this would involve, it might also cause considerable inconvenience, for the Baron's spirit, on seeing its own body so near to it, might be taken with the desire of re-entering it. This would give rise to a struggle in which Thibault could not well defend himself without doing serious harm to his own person; some other way out of the difficulty must therefore be found. He had heard a great deal about the wonderful sagacity of animals, and had himself, during his life in the country, had occasion more than once to admire their instinct, and he now determined to trust to that of his horse.

Riding back into the main road, he turned the horse in the direction of Mont-Gobert, and let it have its head. The horse immediately started off at a gallop; it had evidently understood. Thibault troubled himself no further, it was now the horse's affair to bring him safely to his destination.

On reaching the corner of the park wall the animal stopped, not apparently because it was in doubt as to which road to take, but something seemed to make it uneasy, and it pricked its ears. At the same time, Thibault also fancied that he caught sight of two shadows; but they must have been only shadows, for although he stood up in his stirrups and looked all around him, he could see absolutely nothing. They were probably poachers, he thought, who had reasons like himself for wishing to get inside the park. There being no longer anything to bar his passage, he had only, as before, to let the horse go its own way, and he accordingly did so. The horse followed the walls of the park at a quick trot, carefully choosing the soft edge of the road, and not uttering a single neigh; the intelligent animal seemed as if it knew that it must make as little sound as possible.

In this way, they went along the whole of one side of the park, and on reaching the corner, the horse turned as the wall turned, and stopped before a small breach in it. "It's through here, evidently," said Thibault, "that we have to go."

The horse answered by sniffing at the breach, and scraping the ground with its foot; Thibault gave the animal the rein, and it managed to climb up and through the breach, over the loose stones, which rolled away beneath its hoofs. Horse and rider were now within the park. One of the three difficulties had been successfully overcome: Thibault had got in by the *way he knew;* it now remained to find the person *whom he knew,* and he thought it wisest to leave this also to his horse.

The horse went on for another five minutes, and then stopped at a short distance from the Castle, before the door of one of those little huts of rough logs and bark and clay, which are built up in parks, as painters introduce buildings into their landscapes, solely for the sake of ornament.

ON HEARING the horse's hoofs, some one partly opened the door, and the horse stopped in front of it.

A pretty girl came out, and asked in a low voice, "Is it you, Monsieur Raoul?"

"Yes, my child, it is I," answered Thibault, dismounting.

"Madame was terribly afraid that drunken fool of a Champagne might not have given you the letter."

"She need not have been afraid; Champagne brought it me with the most exemplary punctuality."

"Leave your horse, then, and come."

"But who will look after it?"

"Why, Cramoisi, of course, the man who always does."

"Ah, yes, to be sure," said Thibault, as if these details were familiar to him, "Cramoisi will look after it."

"Come, come," said the maid, "we must make haste or Madame will complain again that we loiter in the corridors." And as she spoke these words, which recalled a phrase in the letter which had been written to Raoul, she laughed, and showed a row of pearly white teeth, and Thibault felt that he should like to loiter in the park, before waiting to get into the corridors.

Then the maid suddenly stood still a moment with her head bent, listening.

"What is it?" asked Thibault.

"I thought I heard the sound of a branch creaking under somebody's foot."

"Very likely," said Thibault; "no doubt Cramoisi's foot."

"All the more reason that you should be careful what you do . . . at all events out here."

"I don't understand."

"Do you not know that Cramoisi is the man I am engaged to?"

"Ah! to be sure! But when I am alone with you, my dear Rose, I always forget that."

"I am called Rose now, am I! I never knew such a forgetful man as you are, Monsieur Raoul."

"I call you Rose, my pretty one, because the rose is the queen of flowers, as you are the queen of waiting-maids."

"In good truth, my lord," said the maid, "I have always found you a lively, witty gentleman, but you surpass yourself this evening."

Thibault drew himself up, flattered by this remark. "Let us hope your mistress will think the same!" he said.

"As to that," said the waiting-maid, "any man can make one of these ladies of fashion think him the cleverest and wittiest in the world, simply by holding his tongue."

"Thank you," he said, "I will remember what you say."

"Hush!" said the woman to Thibault, "there is Madame behind the dressing-room curtains; follow me now staidly."

For they had now to cross an open space that lay between the wooded part of the park and the flight of steps leading up to the Castle. Thibault began walking toward the latter.

"Now, now," said the maid, catching hold of him by the arm, "what are you doing, you foolish man?"

"What am I doing? Well, I confess, Suzette, I don't know in the least what I *am* doing!"

"Suzette! so that's my name now, is it? I think Monsieur does me the honor of calling me in turn by the name of all his mistresses. But come, this way! You are not dreaming, I suppose, of going through the great reception rooms. That would give a fine opportunity to my lord the Count, truly!"

And the maid hurried Thibault toward a little door, to the right of which was a spiral staircase.

Half-way up, Thibault put his arm round his companion's waist, which was as slender and supple as a snake.

"I think we must be in the corridors, now, eh?" he asked, trying to kiss the young woman's pretty cheek.

"No, not yet," she answered; "but never mind that."

"By my faith," he said, "if my name this evening were Thibault instead of Raoul, I would carry you up with me to the garrets, instead of stopping on the first floor!"

At that moment a door was heard grating on its hinges.

"Quick, quick, Monsieur!" said the maid, "Madame is growing impatient."

And drawing Thibault after her, she ran up the remaining stairs to the corridor, opened a door, pushed Thibault into a room, and shut the door after him, firmly believing that it was the Baron Raoul de Vauparfond, or, as she herself called him, the most forgetful man in the world, whom she had thus secured.

CHAPTER 17

The Baron de Mont-Gobert

THIBAULT found himself in the Countess's room. If the magnificence of Bailiff Magloire's furniture rescued from the lumber-room of his Highness the Duke of Orleans had astonished Thibault, the daintiness, the harmony, the taste of the Countess's room filled him with intoxicating delight. The rough child of the forest had never seen anything like it, even in dreams; for one can not even dream of things of which we have no idea.

A vague and indescribably delicate perfume pervaded the air, one could not say from what sweet essence, for it was scarcely even a perfume, but rather an emanation, the same kind of odorous exhalation whereby Eneas, in the *Eneid,* recognized the presence of his mother.

Thibault, pushed into the room by the waiting-maid, made one step forward, and then stopped. He had taken everything in at a glance, inhaled everything at a breath. For a second there passed before his mind's eye like a vision, Agnelette's little cottage, Madame Polet's dining-room, the bedchamber of the Bailiff's wife; but they disappeared as quickly to give place to this delicious paradise of love into which he had been transported as by magic. He could scarcely believe that what he looked upon was real. Were there really men and women in the world so blessed by fortune as to live in such surroundings as these? Had he not been carried to some wizard's castle, to some fairy's palace? And those who enjoyed such favor as this, what special good had they done? What special evil had they done who were deprived of these advantages? Why, instead of wishing to be the Baron for four and twenty hours, had he not wished to be the Countess's lap-dog all his life? How would he bear to be Thibault again after having seen all this? He had just reached this point in his reflections, when the dressing-room door opened and the Countess herself appeared, a fit bird for such a nest, a fit flower for such a sweet-scented garden.

Her hair, fastened only by four diamond pins, hung down loosely to one side, while the rest was gathered into one large curl that hung over the other shoulder and fell into her bosom. The graceful lines of her lithe and well-formed figure, no longer hidden by puffings of dress, were clearly indicated beneath her loose pink silk gown, richly covered with lace; so fine and transparent was the silk of her stockings, that it was more like pearl-white flesh than any texture, and her tiny feet were shod in little slippers made of cloth of silver, with red heels. But not an atom of jewelry—no bracelets on the arms, no rings on the fingers; just one row of pearls round the throat, that was all—but what pearls! worth a king's ransom!

As this radiant apparition came toward him, Thibault fell on his knees; he bowed himself, feeling crushed at the sight of

this luxury, of this beauty, which to him seemed inseparable.

"Yes, yes, you may well kneel—kneel lower, lower yet—kiss my feet, kiss the carpet, kiss the floor, but I shall not any the more forgive you . . . you are a monster!"

"In truth, Madame, if I compare myself with you, I am even worse than that!"

"Ah! yes, pretend that you mistake my words and think I am only speaking of your outward appearance, when you know I am speaking of your behavior . . . and, indeed, if your perfidious soul were imaged in your face, you would verily and indeed be a monster of ugliness. But yet it is not so, for Monsieur, for all his wickedness and infamous doings, still remains the handsomest gentleman in all the country round. But, come now, Monsieur, ought you not to be ashamed of yourself?"

"Because I am the handsomest gentleman in the neighborhood?" asked Thibault, detecting by the tone of the lady's voice that his crime was not an irremediable one.

"No, Monsieur, but for having the blackest soul and the falsest heart ever hidden beneath such a gay and golden exterior. Now, get up, and come and give an account of yourself to me."

And the Countess so speaking held out a hand to Thibault which offered pardon at the same time that it demanded a kiss.

Thibault took the soft, sweet hand in his own and kissed it; never had his lips touched anything so like satin. The Countess now seated herself on the settee and made a sign to Raoul to sit down beside her.

"Let me know something of your doings, since you were last here," said the Countess to him.

"First tell me, dear Countess," replied Thibault, "when I last was here."

"Do you mean you have forgotten? One does not generally acknowledge things of that kind, unless seeking for a cause of quarrel."

"On the contrary, dear friend, it is because the recollection of that last visit is so present with me, that I think it must have been only yesterday we were together, and I try in vain to recall what I have done, and I assure you I have committed no other crime since yesterday but that of loving you."

"That's not a bad speech; but you will not get yourself out of disgrace by paying compliments."

"Dear Countess," said Thibault, "supposing we put off explanations to another time."

"No, you must answer me now; it is five days since I last saw you; what have you been doing all that time?"

"I am waiting for you to tell me, Countess. How can you expect me, conscious as I am of my innocence, to accuse myself?"

"Very well then! I will not begin by saying anything about your loitering in the corridors."

"Oh, pray, let us speak of it! How can you think, Countess, that knowing you, the diamond of diamonds, were waiting for me, I should stop to pick up an imitation pearl?"

"Ah! but I know how fickle men are, and Lisette is such a pretty girl!"

"Not so, dear Jane, but you must understand that she being our confidante, and knowing all our secrets, I can not treat her quite like a servant."

"How agreeable it must be to be able to say to one's self, 'I am deceiving the Comtesse de Mont-Gobert and I am the rival of Monsieur Cramoisi!' "

"Very well then, there shall be no more loiterings in the corridors, no more kisses for poor Lisette, supposing of course there ever have been any!"

"Well, after all, there is no great harm in that."

"Do you mean that I have done something even worse!"

"Where had you been the other night, when you were met on the road between Erneville and Villers-Cotterets?"

"Some one met me on the road?"

"Yes, on the Erneville Road; where were you coming from?"

"I was coming home from fishing."

"Fishing! what fishing?"

"They had been drawing the Verval ponds."

"Oh! we know all about that; you are such a fine fisher, are you not, Monsieur? And what sort of an eel were you bringing back in your net, returning from your fishing at two o'clock in the morning!"

"I had been dining with my friend, the Baron, at Vez."

"At Vez? ha! I fancy you went there mainly to console the beautiful recluse, whom the jealous Baron keeps shut up there a regular prisoner, so they say. But even that I can forgive you."

"What, is there a blacker crime still?" said Thibault, who was beginning to feel quite reassured, seeing how quickly the pardon followed on the accusation; however serious it appeared at first.

"Yes, at the ball given by his Highness the Duke of Orleans."

"What ball?"

"Why, the one yesterday! it's not so very long ago, is it?"

"Oh, yesterday's ball? I was admiring you."

"Indeed; but I was not there."

"Is it necessary for you to be present, Jane, for me to admire you; can not one admire you in remembrance as truly as in person? and if, when absent, you triumph by comparison, the victory is only so much the greater."

"I daresay, and it was in order to carry out the comparison to its utmost limits that you danced four times with Madame de Bonneuil; they are very pretty, are they not? those dark women who cover themselves with rouge, and have eyebrows like the Chinese mannikins on my screens and mustaches like a grenadier."

"Do you know what we talked about during those four dances?"

"It is true, then, that you danced four times with her?"

"It is true, no doubt, since you say so."

"Is that a proper sort of answer?"

"What other could I give? Could any one contradict what was said by so pretty a mouth? Not I, certainly, who would still bless it, even though it were pronouncing my sentence of death."

And, as if to await this sentence, Thibault fell on his knees before the Countess, but at that moment the door opened and Lisette rushed in full of alarm.

"Ah! Monsieur, Monsieur!" she cried, "save yourself! here comes my master the Count!"

"The Count!" exclaimed the Countess.

"Yes, the Count in person, and his huntsman Lestocq, with him."

"Impossible!"

"I assure you, Madame, Cramoisi saw them as plain as I see you; the poor fellow was quite pale with fright."

"Ah! then the meet at Thury was all a pretense, a trap to catch me?"

"Who can tell, Madame? Alas! alas! men are such deceiving creatures!"

"What is to be done?" asked the Countess.

"Wait for the Count and kill him," said Thibault resolutely, furious at again seeing his good fortune escaping from him, at losing what above all things it had been his ambition to possess.

"Kill him? kill the Count? are you mad, Raoul? No, no, you must fly, you must save yourself. . . . Lisette! Lisette! take the Baron through my dressing-room."

And in spite of his resistance, Lisette

by dint of pushing got him safely away. Only just in time! steps were heard coming up the wide main staircase. The Countess, with a last word of love to the supposed Raoul, glided quickly into her bedroom, while Thibault followed Lisette.

SHE led him rapidly along the corridor, where Cramoisi was keeping guard at the other end; then into a room, and through this into another, and finally into a smaller one which led into a little tower; here the fugitives came again on to a staircase corresponding with the one by which they had gone up, but when they reached the bottom they found the door locked. Lisette, with Thibault still following, went back up a few steps into a sort of office in which was a window looking over the garden; this she opened. It was only a few feet from the ground, and Thibault jumped out, landing safely below.

"You know where your horse is," called Lisette; "jump on its back, and do not stop till you get to Vauparfond."

Thibault would have liked to thank her for all her kindly warnings, but she was some six feet above him and he had no time to lose. A stride or two brought him to the clump of trees under which stood the little building which served as stable for his horse. But was the horse still there? He heard a neigh which reassured him; only the neigh sounded, he thought, more like a cry of pain.

Thibault went in, put out his hand, felt the horse, gathered up the reins, and leaped on to its back without touching the stirrups; Thibault, as we have already said, had suddenly become a consummate horseman. But the horse no sooner felt the weight of the rider on its back than the poor beast began to totter on its legs. Thibault dug his spurs in savagely, and the horse made a frantic effort to stand. But in another instant, uttering one of those pitiful neighs which Thibault had heard when he approached the stable, it rolled helplessly over on its side.

Thibault quickly disengaged his leg from under the animal, which, as the poor thing struggled to rise, he had no difficulty in doing, and he found himself again on his feet. Then it became clear to him, that in order to prevent his escape, Monsieur le Comte de Mont-Gobert had hamstrung his horse.

Thibault uttered an oath: "If I ever meet you, Monsieur Comte de Mont-Gobert," he said, "I swear that I will hamstring you, as you have hamstrung this poor beast."

Then he rushed out of the little building, and remembering the way he had come, turned in the direction of the breach in the wall, and walking quickly toward it, found it, climbed over the stones, and was again outside the park. But his further passage was barred, for there in front of him was the figure of a man, who stood waiting, with a drawn sword in his hand. Thibault recognized the Comte de Mont-Gobert; the Comte de Mont-Gobert thought he recognized Raoul de Vauparfond.

"Draw, Baron!" said the Count.

Further explanation was unnecessary. Thibault, on his side, equally enraged at having the prey, on which he had already set tooth and claw, snatched away from him, was as ready to fight as the Count. He drew, not his sword, but his hunting-knife, and the two men crossed weapons.

Thibault, who was something of an adept at quarterstaff, had no idea of fencing; what was his surprize, therefore, when he found that he knew by instinct how to handle his weapon, and could parry and thrust according to all the rules of the art. He parried the first two or three of the Count's blows with admirable skill.

"Ah, I heard, I remember," muttered the Count between his clenched teeth, "that at the last match you rivalled Saint-Georges himself at the foils."

Thibault had no conception who Saint-Georges might be, but he was conscious of a strength and elasticity of wrist, thanks to which he felt he might have rivalled the devil himself.

So far, he had only been on the defensive; but the Count having aimed one or two unsuccessful lunges at him, he saw his opportunity, struck out, and sent his knife clean through his adversary's shoulder. The Count dropped his sword, tottered, and falling on to one knee, cried "Help, Lestocq!"

Thibault ought then to have sheathed his knife and fled; but, unfortunately, he remembered the oath he had taken as regards the Count, when he had found that his horse had been hamstrung. He slipped the sharp blade of his weapon under the bent knee and drew it toward him; the Count uttered a cry; but as Thibault rose from his stooping posture, he too felt a sharp pain between his shoulder-blades, followed by a sensation as of extreme cold over the chest, and finally the point of a weapon appeared above his right breast. Then he saw a cloud of blood, and knew no more. Lestocq, called to his master's aid as the latter fell, had run to the spot, and, as Thibault rose from hamstringing the Count, had seized that moment to dig his hunting-knife into his back.

CHAPTER 18

Death and Resurrection

THE cold morning air brought Thibault back to consciousness; he tried to rise, but the extremity of his pain held him bound. He was lying on his back, with no remembrance of what had happened, seeing only the low gray sky above him. He made another effort, and managed to lift himself on his elbow. As he looked around him, he began to recall the events of the previous night; he recognized the breach in the wall; and then there came back to him the memory of the love meeting with the Countess and the desperate duel with the Count. The ground near him was red with blood, but the Count was no longer there; no doubt Lestocq, who had given him this fine blow that was nailing him to the spot, had helped his master indoors; Thibault they had left there, to die like a dog, as far as they cared. He had it on the tip of his tongue to hurl after them all the maledictory wishes wherewith one would like to assail one's cruelest enemy. But since Thibault had been no longer Thibault, and indeed during the remainder of the time that he would still be the Baron Raoul, or at least so in outward appearance, his demoniacal power had been and would continue in abeyance.

He had until nine o'clock that evening; but would he live till then? This question gave rise in Thibault to a very uneasy state of mind. If he were to die before that hour, which of them would die, he or the Baron? It seemed to him as likely to be one as the other. What, however, disturbed and angered him most was his consciousness that the misfortune which had befallen him was again owing to his own fault. He remembered now that before he had expressed the wish to be the Baron for four and twenty hours, he had said some such words as these:

"I should laugh, Raoul, if the Comte de Mont-Gobert were to take you by surprize; you would not get off so easily as if he were the Bailiff Magloire; there would be swords drawn, and blows given and received."

At last, with a terrible effort, and suffering the while excruciating pain, Thibault succeeded in dragging himself on

to one knee. He could then make out people walking along a road not far off on their way to market, and he tried to call to them, but the blood filled his mouth and nearly choked him. So he put his hat on the point of his knife and signalled to them like a shipwrecked mariner, but his strength again failing, he once more fell back unconscious. In a little while, however, he again awoke to sensation; he appeared to be swaying from side to side as if in a boat. He opened his eyes; the peasants, it seemed, had seen him, and although not knowing who he was, had had compassion on this handsome young man lying covered with blood, and had concocted a sort of hand-barrow out of some branches, on which they were now carrying him to Villers-Cotterets. But by the time they reached Puiseux, the wounded man felt that he could no longer bear the movement, and begged them to put him down in the first peasant's hut they came to, and to send a doctor to him there. The carriers took him to the house of the village priest, and left him there, Thibault before they parted distributing gold among them from Raoul's purse, accompanied by many thanks for all their kind offices. The priest was away saying mass, but on returning and finding the wounded man, he uttered loud cries of lamentation.

Had he been Raoul himself, Thibault could not have found a better hospital. The priest had at one time been Curé of Vauparfond, and while there had been engaged to give Raoul his first schooling. Like all country priests, he knew, or thought he knew, something about doctoring; so he examined his old pupil's wound. The knife had passed under the shoulder-blade, through the right lung, and out between the second and third ribs.

He did not for a moment disguise to himself the seriousness of the wound, but he said nothing until the doctor had been to see it. The latter arrived, and after his examination he turned and shook his head.

"Are you going to bleed him?" asked the priest.

"What would be the use?" asked the doctor. "If it had been done at once after the wound was given, it might perhaps have helped to save him, but it would be dangerous now to disturb the blood in any way."

"Is there any chance for him?" asked the priest, who was thinking that the less there was for the doctor to do, the more there would be for the priest.

"If his wound runs the ordinary course," said the doctor, lowering his voice, "he will probably not last out the day."

"You give him up, then?"

"A doctor never gives up a patient, or at least if he does so, he still trusts to the possibility of nature mercifully interfering on the patient's behalf; a clot may form and stop the hemorrhage; a cough may disturb the clot, and the patient bleed to death."

"You think then that it is my duty to prepare the poor young man for death?" asked the curate.

"I think," answered the doctor, shrugging his shoulders, "you would do better to leave him alone; in the first place because he is, at present, in a drowsy condition and can not hear what you say; later on, because he will be delirious, and unable to understand you."

But the doctor was mistaken; the wounded man, drowsy as he was, overheard this conversation, more reassuring as regards the salvation of his soul than the recovery of his body. How many things people say in the presence of sick persons, believing that they can not hear, while all the while they are taking in every word! In the present case, this

extra acuteness of hearing may perhaps have been due to the fact that it was Thibault's soul which was awake in Raoul's body; if the soul belonging to it had been in this body, it would probably have succumbed more entirely to the effects of the wound.

The doctor now dressed the wound in the back, but left the front wound uncovered, merely directing that a piece of linen soaked in iced water should be kept over it. Then, having poured some drops of a sedative into a glass of water, and telling the priest to give this to the patient whenever he asked for drink, the doctor departed, saying that he would come again the following morning, but that he much feared he should take his journey for nothing.

THIBAULT would have liked to put in a word of his own, and to say himself what he thought about his condition, but his spirit was as if imprisoned in this dying body, and, against his will, was forced to submit to lying thus within its cell. But he could still hear the priest, who not only spoke to him, but endeavored by shaking him to arouse him from his lethargy. Thibault found this very fatiguing, and it was lucky for the priest that the wounded man, just now, had no superhuman power, for he inwardly sent the good man to the devil, many times over.

Before long it seemed to him that some sort of hot burning-pan was being inserted under the soles of his feet, his loins, his head; his blood began to circulate, then to boil, like water over a fire. His ideas became confused, his clenched jaws opened; his tongue became loosened; some disconnected words escaped him.

"Ah, ah!" he thought to himself, "this no doubt is what the good doctor spoke about as delirium;" and, for the while at least, this was his last lucid idea.

His whole life—and his life had really only existed since his first acquaintance with the black wolf—passed before him. He saw himself following, and failing to hit the buck; saw himself tied to the oak-tree, and the blows of the strap falling on him; saw himself and the black wolf drawing up their compact; saw himself trying to pass the devil's ring over Agnelette's finger; saw himself trying to pull out the red hairs, which now covered a third of his head. Then he saw himself on his way to pay court to the pretty Madame Polet of the mill, meeting Landry, and getting rid of his rival; pursued by the farm servants, and followed by his wolves. He saw himself making the acquaintance of Madame Magloire, hunting for her, eating his share of the game, hiding behind the curtains, discovered by Maître Magloire, flouted by the Baron of Vez, turned out by all three. Again he saw the hollow tree, with his wolves couching around it and the owls perched on its branches, and heard the sounds of the approaching violins and the hautboy and saw himself looking, as Agnelette and the happy wedding party went by. He saw himself the victim of angry jealousy, endeavoring to fight against it by the help of drink, and across his troubled brain came the recollection of François, of Champagne, and the inkeeper; he heard the galloping of Baron Raoul's horse, and he felt himself knocked down and rolling in the muddy road. Then he ceased to see himself as Thibault; in his stead arose the figure of the handsome young rider whose form he had taken for a while. Once more he was kissing Lisette, once more his lips were touching the Countess's hand; then he was wanting to escape, but he found himself at a cross-road where three ways only met, and each of these was guarded by one of his vic-

tims: the first, by the specter of a drowned man, that was Marcotte; the second, by a young man dying of fever on a hospital bed, that was Landry; the third, by a wounded man dragging himself along on one knee and trying in vain to stand up on his mutilated leg, that was the Comte de Mont-Gobert.

He fancied that as all these things passed before him, he told the history of them one by one, and that the priest, as he listened to this strange confession, looked more like a dying man, was paler and more trembling than the man whose confession he was listening to; that he wanted to give him absolution, but that Thibault pushed him away, shaking his head, and that he cried out with a terrible laugh: "I want no absolution! I am damned! damned! damned!"

And in the midst of all this hallucination, this delirious madness, the spirit of Thibault could hear the priest's clock striking the hours, and as they struck he counted them. Only this clock seemed to have grown to gigantic proportions and the face of it was the blue vault of heaven, and the numbers on it were flames; and the clock was called eternity, and the monstrous pendulum as it swung backward and forward called out in turn at ever beat: "Never! For ever!"

So he lay and heard the long hours of the day pass one by one; and then at last the clock struck nine. At half past nine, he, Thibault, would have been Raoul, and Raoul would have been Thibault, for just four and twenty hours. As the last stroke of the hour died away, Thibault felt the fever passing from him; it was succeeded by a sensation of coldness, which almost amounted to shivering. He opened his eyes, all trembling with cold, and saw the priest at the foot of the bed saying the prayers for the dying, and the hands of the actual clock pointing to a quarter past nine.

His senses had become so acute, that, imperceptible as was their double movement, he could yet see both the larger and smaller one slowly creeping along; they were gradually nearing the critical hour: half past nine! Although the face of the clock was in darkness, it seemed illuminated by some inward light. As the minute hand approached the number 6, a spasm becoming every instant more and more violent shook the dying man; his feet were like ice, and the numbness slowly but steadily mounted from the feet to the knees, from the knees to the thighs, from the thighs to the lower part of the body. The sweat was running down his forehead, but he had no strength to wipe it away, nor even to ask to have it done. It was a sweat of agony which he knew every moment might be the sweat of death. All kinds of strange shapes, which had nothing of the human about them, floated before his eyes; the light faded away; wings as of bats seemed to lift his body and carry it into some twilight region, which was neither life nor death, but seemed a part of both. Then the twilight itself grew darker and darker; his eyes closed, and like a blind man stumbling in the dark, his heavy wings seemed to flap against strange and unknown things. After that he sank away into unfathomable depths, into bottomless abysses, but still he heard the sound of a bell.

The bell rang once, and scarcely had it ceased to vibrate when the dying man uttered a cry. The priest rose and went to the side of the bed; with that cry the Baron Raoul had breathed his last: it was exactly one second after the half-hour after nine.

(To be continued next month)

Coming Next Month

FARLEY'S mind was working again. "Doctor Curtlin—I remember now," he exclaimed. "You're the physician who kicked up the stir in medical circles two years ago with a claim that you could rebuild and revivify disintegrating life-cells by a new combination of rays."

"That is the basis of my process," Curtlin admitted. "Naturally, I am not going to give its details to any one."

"But you took Clay's body from the tomb," said the awed reporter; "you brought him back to life with that process——"

The voice of the woman behind him interrupted him. "Then you *were* dead, Howard!" she cried. "I knew that you were—I knew——"

Clay's face softened. "I was, but I am living now, Helen," he said. "I would have spared you this shock if I could have." He took a step toward her.

"Don't come near me!" she screamed. "You can't be living now when you say yourself that you were dead! I followed you myself to your tomb, and now—oh God, now you've come back!"

"Helen, I am living!" Clay insisted desperately. "I did die, but I've been brought back to life just as an unconscious man can be brought back to consciousness!"

"I only know that you died and were buried!" she cried. "I won't stay here with you. I'm going to leave this house now!"

"Helen, do I mean nothing more to you than that?" Clay pleaded. "Does the twenty years we lived together mean nothing?"

"I lived those years with a living man," she said unsteadily. "I can't—I can't live with a dead one." She turned and stumbled from the hall. . . .

Read the whole of this dramatic thrill-tale, about three millionaires, dead and buried for months, who reappeared in the world of the living. It will be printed complete in our next issue:

THE THREE FROM THE TOMB

By EDMOND HAMILTON

—ALSO—

THE DEVIL'S BRIDE

By Seabury Quinn

The most thrilling novel that has appeared for years. A tale that has everything that a weird story should possess—horror, thrill, shudders, breath-taking interest, suspense, and vivid action. Of course, Jules de Grandin is the central figure of the story, and in it he experiences his most thrilling adventures.

DEVOURING SHADOWS

By N. J. O'Neail

A startling weird-scientific story of shadows from the fourth dimension, that descended upon our world and wiped it clean of life.

NIGHT AND SILENCE

By Maurice Level

A new and grimly powerful short story by a great French master of the weird tale.

THE TREE-MEN OF M'BWA

By Donald Wandrei

The author of "The Red Brain" narrates a startling story of Africa, strange monstrosities, and the weird power of the Whirling Flux.

THE THING ON THE ROOF

By Robert E. Howard

A shuddery tale of an old, legend-haunted tomb in Honduras, and the doom that pursued the man who opened it.

THE LAUGHING DUKE

By Wallace G. West

A tale of the days of the robber barons, when human life was held cheaply—a romantic story of the eery revenge of Florian, Duke of Orthow.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the next issue. Also, another thrilling installment of Alexandre Dumas' exciting tale, **The Wolf-Leader**, and the smashing conclusion of Gaston Leroux's fascinating serial, **The Haunted Chair.**

February WEIRD TALES Out January 1

(Continued from page 6)

with mediæval history and ancient history, with devils, elementals, witches, etc. I have not seen, or at least do not remember seeing, a story in W. T. concerning either the old Mediterranean gods and goddesses or the Scandinavian ones. Also stories about the Incas, Aztecs and Mayas I think would be appropriate. Do not keep all the Oriental stories out for the other magazine."

"In 1928 I chanced upon my first copy of WEIRD TALES in the home of a writer of confession yarns," writes E. Jean Magie, of Los Angeles. "I found in it what I consider one of the best short stories I have ever read. It was written by Maurice Rothman and entitled *The Dream*. Since then I have looked eagerly through the pages of WEIRD TALES for other stories from him, but none has appeared. What has become of Mr. Rothman? Has your galaxy of super-writers quite crowded him from your field? Or was he one of those free-lance contributors who ring the bell once but can't quite make that particular market again? His story was the perfect blending of the hero's dream yearnings with the sordid, actual life he was doomed to live. Now, I admit I am an addict of WEIRD TALES. I found Lovecraft's *The Rats in the Walls* incomparable, also *The Outsider*. Robert E. Howard's Solomon Kane is a fascinating character. He takes one through the impossible and makes one like it. Clark Ashton Smith's *Voyage to Sfanomoë* is a poem in prose. Like Rothman's *The Dream*, it fascinates me. I often read both, always to find fresh beauty with the reading." [Mr. Magie will be glad to learn that Mr. Rothman is not a "flash in the pan." Recently one of his stories was selected by Edward J. O'Brien as the best story published in that year. We regret that we have nothing on hand by him.—THE EDITORS.]

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? *Placide's Wife*, the vampire story by Kirk Mashburn, was easily the most popular story in the November issue.

My Favorite Stories in the January Weird Tales Are;

Story	Remarks
(1)	
(2)	
(3)	

I do not like the following stories:

(1) _____ Why? _____

(2) _____ _____

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

_____

_____

_____

Rupture No Longer Spoils My Fun

"Now that I am rid of my rupture and do not wear a truss, I enjoy dancing again. Many strenuous activities are pleasures, because I am not handicapped in any way. My work is no longer a task—I enjoy it. No one would ever believe I was crippled by rupture."

This is the way people write us after ridding themselves of rupture by using STUART'S ADHESIF PLAPAO-PADS.

Stacks of sworn endorsements report success—without delay from work.

Plapao-Pads cling to the body without straps, buckles or springs. Easy to apply—economical and comfortable.

Convince yourself by actually testing Plapao at our expense. Send coupon today.

Test of Factor "PLAPAO"

FREE! ACT SPEEDILY

MAIL COUPON BELOW TODAY

Plapao Laboratories, Inc.,
863 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Send me FREE Trial Plapao and 48-page book on Rupture. No charge for this now or later.

Name_____

Address_____

$-ALWAYS HAVE LUCK!-$

Unlucky in Money Games, Love or Business? You should carry a pair of genuine MYSTIC BRAHMA RED LIVE HIGHLY MAGNETIC LODE STONES. Rare, Amazing, Compelling, Attractive these LIVE LODESTONES are carried by Occult Oriental people as a POWERFUL LUCKY CHARM, one to prevent Bad Luck, Evil and Misfortune, and the other to attract much Good Luck, Love, Happiness and Prosperity. Special only $1.97 for the two. With valuable instructions FREE. Pay postman $1.97 and 15c. postage on delivery. Satisfaction or money refunded. You can be LUCKY! Order yours TODAY!
Dept. 848, P. S. BUREAU, General P. O. Box 72, Brooklyn, N. Y.

NOTICE! We absolutely GUARANTEE these genuine Mystic Brahma Lodestones are ALIVE! Just what you want, for they are the REAL THING—POWERFUL, HIGHLY MAGNETIC! GET YOURS NOW!!

POSITIONS ON OCEAN LINERS; EXPERIENCE unnecessary. List of positions free. E. Arculus, Mount Vernon, N. Y.

For list of back copies for sale and prices—write, WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Continued from page 31

mainly from terrific jungles near the southern pole. He was soon privileged to hear her play on a certain musical instrument of the country, in which were combined the characters of the flute and the lute. And at last, one day, when he knew enough of the tongue to appreciate a few of its subtleties, she read to him from a scroll of vegetable vellum one of her poems, an ode to a star known as Atana by the people of Omanorion. This ode was truly exquisite, was replete with poetic fancies of a high order, and expressed a halfironic yearning, sadly conscious of its own impossibility, for the ultra-sidereal realms of Atana. Ending, she added:

"I have always loved Atana, because it is so little and so far away."

On questioning her, Alvor learned to his overwhelming amazement, that Atana was identical with a minute star called Arot in Ulphalor, which Vizaphmal had once pointed out to him as the sun of his own earth. This star was visible only in the rare interlunar dark, and it was considered a test of good eyesight to see it even then.

When the poet had communicated this bit of astronomical information to Ambiala, that the star Atana was his own native sun, and had also told her of his Ode to Antares, a most affecting scene occurred, for the empress encircled him with her five arms and cried out:

"Do you not feel, as I do, that we were destined for each other?"

Though he was a little discomposed by Ambiala"s display of affection, Alvor could do no less than assent. The two beings, so dissimilar in external ways,

NEXT MONTH

The Devil's Bride

By SEABURY QUINN

HERE is the story you have been waiting for: a novel about the fascinating French occultist and scientist, Jules de Grandin. This is the most spectacular adventure in which the quick-tempered French ghost-breaker has appeared, and the story packs as many thrills to the square inch as any tale you have ever read.

WEIRDNESS, adventure, humor, mystery and pathos are perfectly blended in this story. It is a tale of devil-worship, of the Black Mass—the infamous Mass of St. Secaire—eery murders, blood-chilling scenes, beautiful women; and every page is replete with vivid action. This masterpiece of weird literature will begin in the

February issue of

WEIRD TALES

On sale January 1st

To avoid missing your copy, clip and mail this coupon today for SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER.

WEIRD TALES
840 N. Michigan Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed find $1.60 for which send me the next five issues of WEIRD TALES to begin with the February issue ($1.75 in Canada). Special offer void unless remittance is accompanied by coupon.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

were absolutely overcome by the rapport revealed in this comparing of poetic notes; and a real understanding, rare even with persons of the same evolutionary type, was established between them henceforward. Also, Alvor soon developed a new appreciation of the outward charms of Ambiala, which, to tell the truth, had not altogether intrigued him heretofore. He reflected that after all her five arms and three legs and three eyes were merely a superabundance of anatomical features upon which human love was wont to set a by no means lowly value. As for her opalescent coloring, it was, he thought, much more lovely than the agglomeration of outlandish hues with which the human female figure had been adorned in many modernistic paintings.

When it became known in Lompior that Alvor was the lover of Ambiala, no surprize or censure was expressed by any one. Doubtless the people, especially the male Alphads who had vainly wooed the empress, thought that her tastes were queer, not to say eccentric. But anyway, no comment was made: it was her own amour after all, and no one else could carry it on for her. It would seem, from this, that the people of Omanorion had mastered the ultra-civilized art of minding their own business.

Coming soon—

THE VENGEANCE OF IXMAL

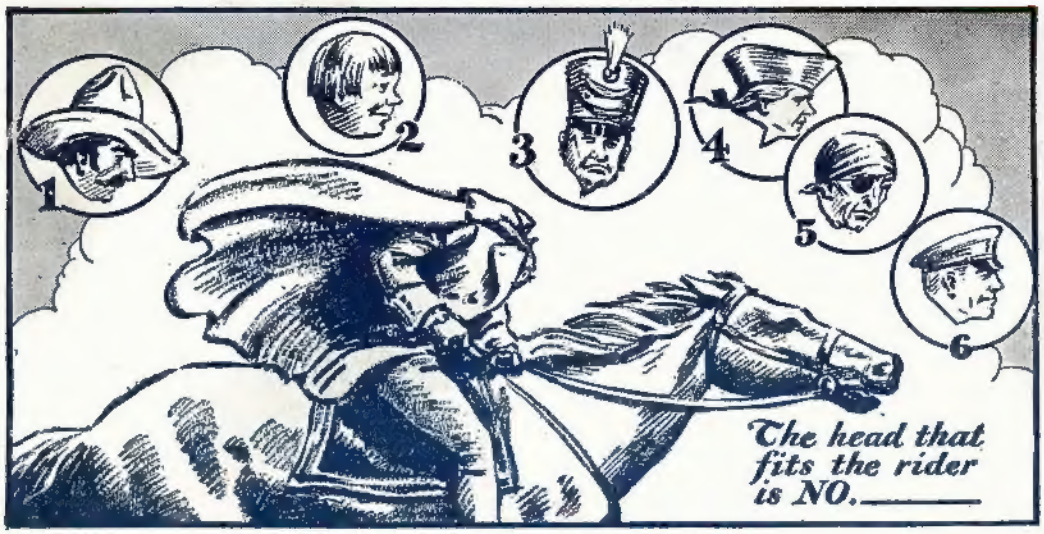
By Kirk Mashburn

Another superb vampire-tale by the author of "Placide's Wife."

MIRACLE CHARMS OF INDIA! YOU WILL learn how to charm in all motives. Apply for free booklet. (Postage to India 5c.) Rupanarayan Stores, Chandernagore, India.

Win $3,700.00

OR BUICK 8 SEDAN AND $2,500 IN CASH



Solve this Old Mystery

Find the Head of the Mysterious Headless Horseman. Six heads are shown. Only one of them belongs to the Mysterious Headless Horseman who for years struck terror to the heart of a peaceful village. No one ever saw his head. Can you now solve this age-old mystery? Here is your chance to qualify to win $3,700.00 cash or Buick 8 Cylinder Sedan and $2,500 cash besides. You must look carefully. See that the head you pick fits the collar of the mysterious night rider. Rush your answer at once to qualify in this gigantic distribution of $12,960 or 4 Buick Sedans and $8,160.00 in Cash Prizes.

This sensational, easy money making opportunity is just our way of advertising. Someone who solves our puzzle is going to win $3,700.00. Many other big cash prizes. **Anyone may win—why not you?** This big fortune in cash and automobiles must be given away. Find the Headless Horseman's Head. Get your share of this easy money.

Easy to Win $12,960.00 in 103 Cash Prizes

We will give away $12,960 in cash. You are sure to profit if you take an active part. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be given. **You get $3,700 if you win grand first prize.** In addition there are 102 other wonderful cash prizes. The winner of the grand second prize may win $2,200, and winner of the grand third prize may win $1,700. Also four other prizes of $500.00 each and many others. All told $12,960 in cash. Money to pay you is already on deposit in the Mercantile Trust and Savings Bank, a big Chicago Bank.

Indiana Farmer Wins $3,500!

This is a picture of Mr. C. H. Essig, Argos, Ind., taken on his farm. He writes: "Wish to acknowledge receipt of your $3,500 prize check. Oh, boy! This is the biggest sum of money I ever had in my hands. It is indeed a fortune to me."

Mrs. Kate Needham, of Oregon, won $4,705.00. Miss Serena Burbach, of Wisconsin, won $1,125. M. D. Reidman of Minnesota, won $2,560. Hundreds of men, women, boys and girls have been rewarded in our past advertising campaigns.

$1,000.00 for Promptness

Send your answer at once. Make sure to qualify for $1,000 extra given for promptness if you win the Buick Sedan—a total of $3,700 if you prefer all cash.

Send No Money The main thing is—send in your answer today. You can share in this advertising cash distribution. Hurry! and take no chance of losing the extra reward of $1,000 for promptness if you win grand first prize. Act now! You don't need to send a penny of your money to win! Just find the Headless Horseman's head—mail with coupon or write me a letter at once for particulars.

Send Coupon Today

ROGER SCOTT, Mgr.,
427 W. Randolph, Dept. 2382
Chicago, Illinois

The head that fits the rider is No. ..... I am anxious to win $3,700. Please tell me how I stand.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....